JOURNAL OF

# THE TRANSACTIONS

OF

# The Victoria Institute,

OR

## Philosophical Society of Great Britain.

EDITED BY THE HONORARY SECRETARY,
CAPT. FRANCIS W. H. PETRIE, F.R.S.L., &c.

## VOL. XVII.


LONDON:
(Published for the Institute)
E. STANFORD, 55, CHARING CROSS, S.W.
EDINBURGH: R. GRANT & SON. DUBLIN: G. HERBERT.
PARIS: GALIGNANI & CO.

AUSTRALIA AND NEW ZEALAND:
GEORGE ROBERTSON & CO., LIMITED.

1884.

## ORDINARY MEETING, FEBRUARY 5, 1883.

REV. R. THORNTON, D.D., VICE-PRESIDENT, IN THE CHAIR.

The Minutes of the last Meeting were read and confirmed, and the following elections were announced :—

MEMBERS :—W. G. Ainslie, Esq., London; Rev. A. Thursby-Pelham, M.A., Shrewsbury; Lieut.-Col. W. Larkins Walker, Brighton.

ASSOCIATES :—The Right Rev. the Bishop of Bathurst, New South Wales; J. Maitland Anderson, Esq., St. Andrews; Rev. A. R. Blackett, M.A., New South Wales; Rev. C. Ray Palmer, M.A., United States.

Also the presentation of the following Works for the Library :—

| | |
|---|---|
| "Proceedings of the Royal Society." | *From the same.* |
| "Proceedings of the United Service Institution." | *From the same.* |
| "Proceedings of the Canadian Institute." | *From the same.* |
| "Proceedings of the American Bureau of Ethnology." | *From the same.* |
| "The American Antiquarian." | *From the Editor.* |
| "The Remote Antiquity of Man." | *From the Author.* |

The following Paper was then read by the Author :—

*IS IT POSSIBLE TO KNOW GOD? (CONSIDERATIONS ON "THE UNKNOWN AND UNKNOWABLE" OF MODERN THOUGHT).* By the Rev. J. J. LIAS, Vicar of St. Edward's, Cambridge.

IN the last paper which I had the honour of reading before the Victoria Institute I was gently censured for quoting Dean Mansel's *Bampton Lectures* as adding any strength to the Christian position, although I specially guarded myself against being supposed to agree with all that was said therein. This set me upon the task of weighing that remarkable contribution to apologetic literature, and of ascertaining how much of it was really valuable, and how much was justly liable to the criticisms so freely lavished upon the volume on its first appearance. It appeared to me then, and it appears to me now, to be hardly fair to place so learned, and, in many respects, so orthodox a divine as Dean Mansel in a kind of *Index Expurgatorius;* to represent his works as pitch so unmixed that no one could even so much as touch them without contracting defilement. There are passages, such as I quoted in my last paper, so admirable, so clear, so convincing, that they deserve to be written in letters of gold. There are, nevertheless, principles laid down in those same lectures of so

dangerous a tendency, that, as was pointed out at the time of their appearance, they strike, not only at the foundations of religion, but of morality also.* That the first is the case is only too clear from the fact that Mr. Herbert Spencer quotes Dean Mansel with approbation in the opening chapters of his *First Principles*, in which he declares religion to have no practical bearing whatever upon life. Dean Mansel is the authority he quotes for regarding religion as the "negative pole of thought,"† as being practically valueless, because, instead of being connected with the real and the tangible, it is concerned entirely with the uncertain and the unintelligible.‡ It is on Dean Mansel's principles that Mr. Spencer tells us that religion may be dismissed from our thoughts because "the mystery it contemplates is ultimate and absolute." §

2. Mr. Goldwin Smith has pointed out the key to this extraordinary contradiction between different portions of Dean Mansel's volume, when he refers to the "happy inconsistency" ‖ between Dean Mansel as a philosopher and Dean Mansel as a Christian. It is not the Dean's religious but his metaphysical principles that are to blame. In spite of his earnest Christianity, his great learning, his unrivalled felicity of expression, and—metaphysical speculations apart—his unquestionable orthodoxy, he has become a victim of a false system of philosophy, and, in spite of some brilliant affairs of outposts, he has really betrayed the citadel into the enemy's hands. It is the object of this present paper to investigate, as far as such brief limits permit, the grounds on which God is said to be unknowable, and the grounds on which Christians assert that they may know Him. The question is one of

---

* See Mr. Goldwin Smith's strictures on Dean Mansel's *Lectures*.

† *First Principles*, p. 107.

‡ "Religion and science are, therefore, necessary correlatives. . . . They stand respectively for those two antithetical modes of consciousness which cannot exist asunder. A known cannot be thought of apart from an unknown; nor can an unknown be thought of apart from a known."—*First Principles*, p. 107. [I quote from the fourth edition.]

§ *Ibid.*

‖ *Rational Religion and the Rationalistic Objections to the Bampton Lectures for* 1858. Preface, p. ix. "Throughout these lectures, with the dark growth of the negative philosophy there twines in *happy contradiction*, a more wholesome plant, attesting the real geniality of the soil beneath."—*Ibid.*, p. 18. "Nor while I adhere to the doctrine opposed to that of the lecturer, in regard to his main positions, will I conclude these brief observations without paying the humble tribute of my sincere admiration to the power of statement displayed in some parts of his book. . . . . It is one thing to use controversial weapons borrowed from negative philosophy; it is another thing to be yourself a negative philosopher."—*Ibid.*, p. 20.

much importance in these days: in fact, it may be said to be *the* question of the day. Just as, a few years ago, men who shrank from the responsibility of making up their minds on the great problems debated around them, betook themselves in large numbers to the only body which professed itself able to solve all these problems authoritatively, so now there are hundreds, it may be thousands, who excuse themselves the same responsibility, on the ground that on such points nothing can ever be settled at all. The object of this paper is to examine into the soundness of this conclusion: to inquire, first, whether it be true that God is absolutely and utterly unknowable; and next, what data there are whereby anything may be known about Him. And it may here be stated that such knowledge only is referred to as may serve as a guide to conduct. There will appear, as we proceed, grounds for believing that it is impossible to form adequate abstract or metaphysical conceptions of any object whatever. This may form an admirable reason for inquiring whether there be not some inherent vice in our metaphysical systems, but it constitutes none whatever for dismissing everything whatever into the region of the inscrutable. Whatever metaphysicians say, we *do* live and we *must* act, whether we can form satisfactory metaphysical conceptions of the things with which we have to deal or not. There can be no more reason for relegating God and religion to the domain of the unknowable, and therefore the practically non-existent, than there is for placing everything else in the world around us in the same category.

3. I. It will be impossible, within the limits of this paper, to enter into a detailed examination of the statements contained in Part I. of Mr. Herbert Spencer's *First Principles:* and it will be the more so in that it is my desire, if possible, to be not merely destructive, but constructive. I hope not only to give reasons for rejecting Mr. Spencer's "First Principles" so far as they relate to religion, but to lay down some grounds, at least, for positive belief. I must, therefore, merely deal with the general principles of Mr. Spencer's system on this particular point, and leave the details alone. There is much that is worth notice in these details; there is certainly a great deal that is open to criticism. But, interesting as a more minute examination would be, it would be too lengthy for our present purpose.

4. Mr. Herbert Spencer's main principle, which he derives from Dean Mansel, and the Dean's great authority, Sir W. Hamilton, is that the nature of the "Inscrutable Power which is manifested to us through all phenomena," "transcends intuition and is beyond imagination." "This," he informs

us, "is the certainty to which intelligence has from the first been progressing" (p. 108). He traces an ideal picture of the growth of the doctrine of God from the time when "the rudest savages imagined the causes of all things to be creatures of flesh and blood like themselves" (p. 109), through the period when persons who would "consider it impious" to "think of the creative power as in all respects anthropomorphous" do yet regard it as "in some respects anthropomorphous," (p. 110), to the time when men have become convinced of "the impiety of the pious" (p. 110), and have come finally to regard it as their "highest wisdom and their highest duty to regard that through which all things exist as The Unknowable" (p. 113).*

5. It is a question whether our progress be not altogether the other way; whether so far from confessing that we know less of God, we are not feeling that we know more of Him; whether savages ever did regard the heavenly powers as "creatures of flesh and blood like ourselves"; whether, great as is the mystery in which it has pleased God to enshroud Himself, He has not thought fit, in the course of the ages, to dispel some of the darkness which had formerly surrounded Him. But that there is a certain amount of truth in what Mr. Spencer says, cannot be denied. That there *is* a sense in which God transcends our conceptions, there can be no doubt. The Scriptures tell us this as plainly as Mr. Herbert Spencer.

---

* He goes on to say,—"An immense majority will refuse, with more or less of indignation, a belief seeming to them so shadowy and indefinite. Having always embodied the Ultimate Cause so far as was needful to its mental realisation, they must necessarily resent the substitution of an Ultimate Cause which cannot be mentally realised at all. 'You offer us,' they say, 'an unthinkable abstraction in place of a being towards whom we may entertain definite feelings. Though we are told that the Absolute is real, yet since we are not allowed to conceive it, it might as well be a pure negation. Instead of a power which we can regard as having some sympathy with us, you would have us contemplate a Power to which no emotion whatever can be ascribed. And so we are to be deprived of the very substance of our faith.' This kind of protest," he continues, "of necessity accompanies every change from a lower creed to a higher." Which creed is the "lower" and which the "higher" may be yet for some time a matter of debate. And it is somewhat strange to find Mr. Spencer putting in the mouth of Christians words which attribute "emotions" to God. Though such language may be loosely and inaccurately used, it is at least contradicted by the first Article of the Church of England. It would be interesting to observe, moreover, what our scientific men would say if Space, or Time, or Matter, or Motion, which Mr. Spencer has proved to be equally unthinkable with the "Ultimate Cause," were substituted for it in Mr. Spencer's pages. There would probably be a considerable outcry, not unmingled with expressions of scorn for philosophical pedantries. And not without reason.

"Canst thou by searching find out God?" asks Job.* "No man hath seen God at any time," says the Apostle St. John.† St. Paul tells us that God "dwells in the light that no man can approach unto," and adds, that "no man hath seen," or "can see Him." ‡ Our quarrel with Mr. Spencer, and still more with those who profess to expound Mr. Spencer's principles, and who, like disciples in general, are neither so cautious nor so reverent as their teacher, is that in consequence of this inability to comprehend God we are in effect exhorted to dismiss Him altogether from our thoughts.§

6. Now Mr. Herbert Spencer himself, as well as Dean Mansel, whom he quotes, has taught us that this incapacity for forming abstract conceptions extends, not only to what they call the "Infinite and Absolute," but to everything else whatsoever.‖ Thus, then, to be consistent, we must also dismiss from our minds as utterly inscrutable and impenetrable, and therefore as out of the sphere of all practical action, everything whatsoever that exists, including ourselves. We are as incapable of forming conceptions of space, of time, of being, of man, of self, as we are of God. And yet the proposition that we should regard all these things as practically non-existent, as "transcending intuition" and being "beyond imagination," could not be made outside a lunatic asylum. What right, then, have we to select the idea of God out of a thousand other ideas equally unthinkable,¶ and say that while we will do our best to ascertain what can be known about all the others, we will leave that, and that only, utterly out of our calculations?

7. It will not be difficult to bring proofs from Mr. Herbert Spencer's work of the statement we have just made. Mr. Spencer does not attempt to conceal the facts. All he does is,

---

* Job xi. 7; Cf. xxxvi. 26; xxvii. 23. † St. John i. 18; vi. 46.

‡ 1 Tim. vi. 16; Cf. Rom. xi. 33, 34.

§ I say "in effect," because no sane person would ever try to think about what he believed to be "unthinkable," to concern himself with that whose essence consisted in the fact that it was unknown (*see* p. 2, note 3), or to take any heed whatever of an "Ultimate Cause which cannot be mentally realised at all." (*See* last page, note.)

‖ See *First Principles*, ch. iii., on Ultimate Scientific Ideas; and Mansel, *Bampton Lectures*, lect. iii.

¶ Mr. Spencer (Appendix, p. 580) pours all the vials of his contempt on Professor Birks for representing him as saying that we cannot conceive ideas of these things. He says it is the realities, not the ideas, which cannot be conceived. To conceive a reality is rather a formidable affair. It is, in fact, equivalent to creating it. But what is the meaning of "unthinkable"? Surely it is equivalent to "unable to conceive ideas of." And, if our ideas do not correspond to the reality, they are not really ideas of it at all.

curiously enough, to make use of them only when religion is in question, and to forget them when he is concerned with anything else. He begins his dealings with visible phenomena by discussing three possible hypotheses of the origin of things, each of which he dismisses as equally "unthinkable." The supposition of a First Cause is set aside in a similar manner. There can be no First cause, because the idea of a First cause involves us in metaphysical contradictions.

8. In his next chapter he discusses space and time. These, too, he finds to be equally unthinkable. They are "unthinkable as entities." We can assert "limitation or the absence of limitation" of neither of them (p. 48). We cannot form the conception of unbounded space and time. As little can we conceive of "bounds beyond which" they are not to be found. On the same principles with which Mr. Spencer deals with self-existence, with Creation, with a First Cause, we are compelled to abandon all attempts to think of space and time.*

9. The same is the case with the divisibility of matter. We can only reason about or discover natural phenomena by the assumption of indefinitely small portions of matter entitled atoms. But the supposition involves us in equal contradictions. You can only really conceive of the infinite divisibility of matter by following out the process to infinity, and this would require infinite time (pp. 50–54). Nor can you imagine material parts so small that no material power can divide them; for, as he shows, this supposition involves absurdities as great as those which are involved in the former. Consequently matter itself belongs to the unthinkable,† and everything that deals with matter, all physical science, all history, even man himself, must be unthinkable too.

10. Motion is next discussed, and the conclusion to which we come is that "all efforts to understand its essential nature do but bring us to alternative impossibilities of thought" (p. 58). Force is in the same condition. "It is impossible to form any idea of Force in itself," and "it is equally impossible to comprehend its mode of exercise" (p. 61). Of the extent of consciousness we are told that we are equally unable to believe it to be infinite, or to conceive of it as finite; its substance, that is, "the personality of which each is conscious" is a thing "knowledge of" which "is forbidden by the very laws of thought" (p. 63).

11. This process might be carried on almost to any extent. Not only the root-conceptions of the individual and of the

* They are "wholly incomprehensible," p. 50.

† "Matter, then, in its ultimate nature, is as absolutely inconceivable as space and time," p. 54.

universe, but the most ordinary phenomena of our daily existence, are capable of being thus reduced to a metaphysical absurdity. The infinite, as Mr. Spencer and Dean Mansel tell us,* is impossible to be conceived; and this, as we have seen, is as true of the infinitely little as of the infinitely great. But the infinitely little meets us every day. It is impossible for a clock to strike without the distance between the hands and the point fixed for its striking being gradually reduced to zero, *i.e.* becoming by degrees infinitely small. And the moment at which that point is reached is also an infinitely small period of time. Therefore, as the hand of the clock reaches the appointed hour, we have a non-existent portion of space between the hand and the point for a non-existent portion of time. Yet we shall hardly be persuaded by the most ingenious metaphysician to reckon the striking of a clock as "utterly unthinkable."

12. The same may be said of motion. Though the motions of a railway train and of the earth on which it moves are of course not absolute but relative, nevertheless it is a fact that a railway train traverses a certain portion of the earth's surface in a certain time. But we can only conceive of its doing so by resorting to the expedient of supposing it to describe indefinitely small portions of space in indefinitely small periods of time; that is to say, according to metaphysicians, non-existing portions of space in non-existent portions of time. Metaphysically, this is an absurdity. Practically, it is a fact, and he would be regarded as a madman who attempted to persuade us that we ought to act upon the hypothesis that it was not, or, which is perhaps more exactly a parallel case, that we ought to dismiss all considerations of motion from our minds as "unthinkable."†

13. But Mr. Spencer is not dismayed by the portentous dimensions he has assigned to "the Unknowable." He proceeds to inquire, after having proved that we can know nothing—or rather, as he prefers to put it, that "we cannot know the ultimate nature of that which is manifested to us"—he proceeds to ask, "What can we know?" (p. 127.) And he concludes: "Our postulates are—an Unknowable Power; the existence of knowable likenesses and differences among the manifestations of that Power; and a resulting segregation of the manifestations into subject and object" (p. 157).

---

* *First Principles*, ch. ii.; *Bampton Lectures*, lect. ii.

† It may be remarked that Newton's method of fluxions, the foundation of the methods of the differential and integral calculus, used in all modern scientific research, proceeds upon a similar metaphysical absurdity. Physical science, therefore, is clearly "unthinkable."

14. Now, what we have to ask is, on what ground does Mr. Spencer mark off what he calls "religious" ideas, and those alone, as belonging entirely to the sphere of the Unknowable? What reasons does he give (so far as we can see, he has given none) for the exclusion of the subjects which are known as "religious" from this "segregation into subject and object"? What authority is there, beyond the "unproved sayings" of so great a man, for the doctrine that religious truths cannot be included in the list of "knowable likenesses and differences among the manifestations of the Unknowable Power"? We cannot conceive metaphysically of space, or of time, or of matter, or of motion, or of self. That is to say, we cannot satisfactorily define them on metaphysical principles. And yet they exist. We know it. The ground of this knowledge is what we call, whether we can define it exactly or not, our consciousness. Why, then, should not God exist, although we cannot define satisfactorily the mode of His existence according to the laws of metaphysics? Why should not the universal consciousness of His existence be held to prove it, in spite of all metaphysical difficulty, as it is held to prove all other things? Why should we not regard the spiritual communion between the soul and God as a consequence of the "knowable likenesses and differences among the manifestations of the Unknowable Power"? For our contention with men of Mr. Herbert Spencer's school is not that we profess to know *all* about God, but that we claim to be able to know *something* about Him. All creation is involved in a robe of mystery. The origin of things, the forces of the universe, the phenomena of nature, the secret of existence,—all, as we have seen, are in some respects outside the sphere of our apprehension. Even in our own being, we recognise the presence of truths beyond our power to penetrate. And yet we venture humbly and reverently to believe that God has permitted us to know something about ourselves and the phenomena we perceive around us. Where is the absurdity of supposing that, *pari ratione*, we may know something of Him?

15. It is in the attempt to form abstract conceptions of God that philosophy has failed. We shall see presently that Christianity has not failed, just because she has avoided that pitfall. The attempt to form a Christian philosophy on the basis of abstract conceptions of the Divine nature has always, like Dean Mansel's, involved the person who attempted it, either in a hopeless tangle of perplexities, or in a direct contradiction of the first principles of Christianity. A brief glance at the various theories of God, from Plato downwards, will serve to convince us of the truth of this statement.

16. The Divine, according to Plato, is Abstract Existence, apart from any particular form of it. He is rather a thing than a Person; τὸ ὄν, rather than ὁ ὤν. He is not yet the "Absolute" of modern philosophy, for that is entirely without any connexion with anything else.* But he has made many strides towards it. He is not only greater than all creatures, but He is actually beyond all being whatsoever. He exceeds substance in excellence and power.† This language found its way into the Christian Church, and may have had not a little to do with the fierce controversies on the Divinity of the Son of God which convulsed the East. They meet us in that border land between heathen philosophy and Christianity, the Gnostic heresies. Basilides, as we learn from Hippolytus, regarded the ultimate source of things as pure non-existence,‡ thus anticipating Hegel's dictum, that "pure being is pure nothing." § Valentinus represented his First Cause as depth unfathomable, and, according to some accounts, as dwelling for ever with Silence as his companion.‖ Christian fathers adopt Plato's language. It is found in the earliest extant apologist of the Christian Church, Justin Martyr.¶ Clement of Alexandria** and Origen†† betray the

---

* Mansel, *Bampton Lectures*, lect. iii. p. 50.

† It is to be observed that Plato uses this language, not of the "Absolute" or "Infinite," but of the Good. Dean Mansel has somewhat misrepresented his language in his *Bampton Lectures*, p. 224. See Plato, *Republic*, book vi. sec. 19; Archer Butler, *Lectures on Philosophy*, ii. 59; and Ueberweg, *History of Philosophy*, vol. i., "Plato." Plato's words are: οὐκ οὐσίας ὄντος τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ, ἀλλ' ἔτι ἐπέκεινα τῆς οὐσίας πρεσβείᾳ καὶ δυνάμει ὑπερέχοντος. Knowledge, and truth, and even being itself, flow out of τὸ ἀγαθόν. Metaphysical philosophy has not advanced since Plato's time, in this respect at least.

‡ *Philosophumena*, vii. 9.

§ Hegel believed that every existing thing, by the conditions of existence, must blend two opposite ideas in itself. As pure light, without shadow, would be a medium in which it would be impossible to see, so pure being is a thing which has no actual existence, and is, therefore, identical with pure non-being.

‖ The question about the eternal existence of Silence with the Ultimate Cause, is asserted by Irenæus, but left doubtful by Hippolytus, whose information was more complete. Compare Iren., *Adv. Haer.*, i. 1, with Hipp., *Philosophumena*, iv. 24.

¶ Justin cites Plato as his authority for the statement that "the eye of the mind could clearly see" the τὸ ὄν, yet that he was beyond all being (οὐσία), unspeakable, unexplainable, alone καλὸν καὶ ἀγαθόν. *Dial. c. Tryph.*, ch. iv.

** *Strom.*, ii. 2.

†† According to Origen, *De Principiis*, i. 1, God is "simplex intellectualis natura," cognisable only by means of His works. It is unfortunate that we are left here to Rufinus's Latin translation.

influence of Platonic thought, and through them it found its way into the great Trinitarian controversy of the fourth century. Athanasius himself quotes Plato as submissively as though he were one of the inspired writers.* St. Augustine, when he speaks of God, speaks quite as enigmatically.† In fact, the early fathers loved, if possible, to exaggerate the mystery of the Being of God, that they might exalt the value to humanity of the revelation which is by Jesus Christ.‡

17. Modern philosophy is just as helpless before the mystery of the Divine Existence as ancient. We find the controversy between Bishop Browne and Dr. Clarke quite as perplexing as the language of ancient philosophy. We are equally at fault whether we are told by Spinoza that "God is the being absolutely infinite—*i.e.*, the substance consisting of infinite attributes, each of which expresses an infinite and eternal essence;"§ or by Fichte, that existence implies origin, and God is beyond origin; or by Schelling, that the Absolute is neither real nor ideal, neither thought nor being.‖ It is to this last conception that Sir W. Hamilton, Dean Mansel, and Mr. Herbert Spencer would bring us. God is the

---

* *Contra Gentes* (Paris ed., 1627), vol. i. p. 3. But though God, being good, and more than good, is said, in Plato's words, to transcend all being, we are, nevertheless, told that He gives the apprehension (ἔννοια) and knowledge of Himself to man. So, in his letter on the Decrees of the Nicene Synod, ch. xxi., Athanasius writes that God's Essence is incomprehensible (ἀκατάληπτον). And in his Epistle to the Monks he tells us that if we cannot comprehend what God is, we can at least say what He is not.

† As for instance: "Neque enim voluntas Dei creatura est, sed ante creaturam, quia non crearetur aliquid, nisi Creatoris voluntas præcederet. Ad ipsam ergo Dei substantiam pertinet voluntas ejus."—*Conf.*, xi. 10. And, again, "Præcedis omnia præterita celsitudine semper præsentis æternitatis et superas omnia futura, quia illa futura sunt, et cum venerint, præterita erunt. Tu autem idem ipse es, et anni tui non deficiunt. Anni tui nec eunt nec veniunt . . . . anni hic omnes simul stant, quoniam stant, nec euntes a venientibus excluduntur . . . . Anni tui dies unus, et dies tuus non quotidie, sed hodie."—*Ibid.*, xi. 13.

‡ As in Tertullian's well-known "Certum est quia impossibile."—*De Carne Christi*, ch. v.

§ *Ethics*, First Part, Definition 6.

‖ See Mansel, lect. iii. note 7, p. 49. These writers give various explanations of the Infinite, the Absolute, and the Unconditioned. Fichte regards God as the moral order of the universe and nothing more. Schelling, in his *Vom Ich als Princip der Philosophie*, says that the Unconditioned can be found neither in the sphere of the subject nor the object, but only lies in the "Absolute Ich." Of this he tells us that "it is, simply because it is; and is conceived of, simply because it is conceived of" (p. 8). In like manner, in his *Letters on Dogmatism and Criticism* (Works, p. 152), he says that the existence of God is as incapable of being proved as our own.

Absolute. He is the Infinite. He is the Unconditioned. But the Absolute is "independent of all relation," Dean Mansel tells us.* The Infinite is that which is "free from all possible limitation" (p. 30). The Unconditioned is that which stands apart from all conditions of existence whatsoever.

18. In the face of these metaphysical difficulties, it is some consolation that the God in whom we are asked by Christianity to believe is neither the Infinite nor the Absolute nor the Unconditioned.† And, therefore, in whatever metaphysical difficulties we may be plunged by believing in Him, we are at least not compelled by our faith in Christ to embrace the conception that He is non-entity. Whether it be possible or right to conceive of Him metaphysically as "the sum of all reality" (p. 30), and therefore, as Hegel asserts, of necessity containing evil within Himself, or not, such is not the conception which is placed before the Christian. God is not "the Infinite," *i.e.*, the unlimited, for He cannot die, and therefore death is no part of His Being. He "cannot lie."‡ He cannot deny Himself.§ He cannot do evil, for evil is that which is contrary to His Will; and some schools of theology even conceive of Him as setting bounds to His knowledge by his own Will.‖ God is not the Absolute, for the Absolute consists in the absence of all relation. But relation to other beings, accord-

---

* Page 51. This is the strict meaning of the word. So says Sir W. Hamilton, who derives it from *absolutum*, "what is freed or loosed," and hence it means "what is aloof from relation, comparison, limitations, condition, dependence," &c. Dean Mansel, finding this sense of the word unsuitable to his argument, modifies its meaning in Lecture III. There it means "free from *necessary* relation," and so includes *some* of the ideas ordinarily connected with the nature of God. But in addition to the confusion generally caused by using a word in two different senses, we have here the additional perplexity that the "absolute" in this sense is sometimes absolute in the proper sense of the word, and sometimes not. What is "aloof from all relation" can never, under any circumstances, be related. In entering into relation of any kind, the Absolute ceases to be Absolute. Dean Mansel speaks in pp. 136, 137, of "absolute morality." What does morality become when "independent of all relation," or even of "all necessary relation"? To the idea of infinite morality (p. 134), according to the definition above, there are equal objections. Can there be a morality without limitations?

† Even Plato had got beyond this. His idea of God was not the Infinite or the Absolute, but the Eternal Good (see above). Even Canz's doctrine, that God is to be discerned by an infinite power of action, is superior to our modern conceptions of Him as the Infinite and the Absolute.

‡ Titus i. 2. § 2 Tim. ii. 13.

‖ The theory of Free-will can hardly be maintained except on the hypothesis that God, by the fiat of his own will, parted with His power to determine absolutely the actions of those creatures to whom He had given the gift of freedom.

ing to Revelation, is a necessary part of the Divine attributes.* It is contained in every line of Scripture. He is related to them by Creation, and hence He is their Father. He is related to them by His continual care, and therefore He is their Preserver. He is related to them by ties of a moral character, involving government on His side, obedience on theirs, and therefore He is styled their King. He is related to them by spiritual ties, for He regenerated them when they had fallen from innocence, and hence He is their Redeemer and their Saviour. The word "love" is used to express the "relation," the "conditions" under which God stands in reference to His creatures. "God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, to the end that all that believe in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life." Thus, then, so far from the God of the Christian being "the Absolute," He is essentially the direct opposite of the Absolute. Neither is He the Unconditioned,† for He subsists under certain conditions,—holiness, for instance,—which constitute His essential nature. In point of fact, unless "conditioned" in some way, God could not be properly said to have any nature whatever.

19. Whether it be right or wrong, therefore, the Bible offers us no metaphysical abstractions in its doctrine concerning God, but practical facts. And it was so from the beginning. The Hebrews conceived of God, not as the Infinite and the Absolute, but as the Power which ruled the Universe.‡ Moses presented Him to men, not as non-Being, but as Being; as having life in Himself, and imparting it to all others.§ He is continually described as the "Living God"; that is, as one Who possesses Himself all the energy which we instinctively connect with life, and Who communicates that energy to those beings which, however metaphysically inconceivable, we can see that He has made. And in the New Testament there are two other aspects in which He is presented to us. We are neither told that He is the "Infinite" nor the "Absolute." What we *are* told is that He is Spirit (*i.e.*, breath), and that He is Love; that is, that He communicates Himself, and that He wills the ultimate welfare of creation.

20. These ideas, whether they be metaphysical or not, are

---

* There are inter-relations, according to Revelation, in the bosom of the Trinity itself.

† The Conditioned, according to Sir William Hamilton, is the "conditionally limited," *i. e.* that which is limited by conditions.

‡ Elohim, *i. e.* Power or Strength in all its various forms.

§ Jahveh, *i. e.* the Eternally Existent.

eminently "thinkable." And if all metaphysical conceptions of all phenomena be ultimately reducible to an absurdity, it may possibly be that the true key to metaphysical science has as yet to be found.* The truth is, that one great mistake of metaphysics has been the assigning a real existence to abstract ideas. They are simply convenient formulæ of classification, "symbolic conceptions," as Mr. Herbert Spencer calls them, which assist us in the process of reasoning, but simply mislead us when we substitute these general classifications† in the place of living intelligences. It has often been humorously said that the abstract man is a practical impossibility. He is utterly "unthinkable." He has not, and never could have, any real existence. For he must be neither short nor tall, fair nor dark, fat nor thin, young nor old, good nor bad. In fact, he is quite as impossible as Dean Mansel or Mr. Spencer's "Infinite" or "Absolute." The necessity of such "symbolic conceptions" of man for the purposes of reasoning will not be denied. Yet, if we suppose these conceptions to correspond to anything having a real existence, we are speedily compelled to relegate them to the region of the unthinkable. And yet if those who are here present were to proceed, each one for himself, to conclude that every one else were "unknown and unknowable," and were to resolve to have nothing whatever to do henceforward with the rest of our fellow-creatures, because the "mystery we contemplate" in them "is ultimate and absolute," the result would be a speedy catastrophe for humanity—and for ourselves.

21. The fact is, that it is neither God nor man who is non-existent: it is the speculative conceptions we form of them. These speculative conceptions are purely subjective. That is to say, they have no real existence apart from the mind that conceives them. But real beings are essentially objective; that is to say, they exist entirely independent of any conceptions whatsoever that are formed of them. They

---

* As St. Augustine acutely remarks in his *Confessions*, book xi. 14, when replying to an inquiry for a definition of time, "Si nemo ex me quærat, scio; si quærenti explicare velim, nescio." We can often understand what language is inadequate to explain.

† Or, as Kant calls them, the "form-giving faculties, or, more accurately, those which give goal or aim to our reason." Kuno Fischer; see G. H. Lewes's *History of Philosophy*, vol. ii. p. 503. It is not denied that there are conceptions which correspond to things really existing external to the mind conceiving them. What is denied is, that what are sometimes known as abstract conceptions, or, more properly speaking, generalisations of facts, have an objective existence. See Grote, *Plato and Other Companions of Sokrates*, vol. ii. p. 281.

exist whether those conceptions be adequate or inadequate; and therefore it is an utter absurdity to speak as though their existence were in the slightest degree affected by the possibility or impossibility of our forming satisfactory conceptions of them.

22. Thus, then, as we are compelled to impale ourselves upon one horn or the other of Mr. Spencer's dilemma, we unhesitatingly choose the latter. Satisfactory abstract conceptions of anything in heaven and earth we cannot form; they land us in inextricable contradictions. But "likenesses and differences among the manifestations of the Unknowable" (would it not be more correct to say Undefinable?) "Power" we "can know." In other words, we can form conclusions on which to base our conduct from what we see around us. That is what our reason was given us for. And though we cannot see God, though He transcends our utmost powers, yet we contend that He has given us quite sufficient manifestations of His existence for us to be able to know that He is, and within certain limits *what* He is. Mr. Spencer confesses as much, when he speaks of the "manifestations" of the "unknowable Power." It may be contended that we have here admitted the proposition, that the ideas we form of God are "regulatively true, but speculatively false." I do not admit the charge. It is quite a different thing to say, as I have in effect done, that our ideas of God are regulatively true, but speculatively insufficient. In saying this, I only say what Dean Mansel and Mr. Spencer have proved to be true concerning every object of thought whatsoever. And I have already, I trust, shown that the truth or falsehood of our beliefs is in no way affected by the possibility or impossibility of making them intelligible in an abstract form.

23. II. I proceed briefly to sketch out some of the grounds that exist for a belief in God: belief, that is, in a Living Power which governs this world, a source of the life which abounds in it, a giver of the happiness which, in the gloomiest view we take of existence, must be held to surpass the misery and pain which is to be found in it. And our method will be strictly scientific; that is to say, we shall proceed from observed facts. We shall not, like Aristotle in physical and Mr. Spencer in spiritual science, lay down abstract principles which are fatal to the progress of thought. We shall simply note phenomena, and draw conclusions from those phenomena.

24. And first, we have high authority—Mr. Spencer's own—for believing that there exist "manifestations" of that Power of which we have spoken. From these "manifestations" it can hardly be unreasonable, nay, rather it would appear to be a necessary process for the inquiring spirit of humanity, to

draw some conclusions as to the nature of that Power. The most obvious of these "manifestations" is the existence of Design in Creation. Paley's famous argument of the watch has been much derided of late, and Mr. Herbert Spencer has given us a most extraordinary version of it; but the common-sense of mankind will never be brought to deny that the phenomena of creation, as science presents them to us, most clearly point to what we understand as the workings of Mind.

25. The next point to which we would refer is the existence of Force. No satisfactory explanation of Force has been given save that which regards it as the expression of Will.* But surely it must strike every one that if Force is the expression of the Will of the Undefinable Power, we cannot escape from knowing a good deal of the character of that Power, if we only take the trouble to look at nature. In nature we see the results of that Will. As discovery advances we know more and more about the methods of that Will. With such a multiplicity of facts before us, is it quite reasonable to say, as Mr. Spencer does, that the more thought advances, the less we know of God? Is not Science a progressive Revelation of Him?

26. A similar argument may be drawn from the purpose of creation. The world literally swarms with life, and life, in the main, is enjoyment. Is it unfair to draw from hence an inference that the purpose of creation is happiness? Pessimist philosophers may endeavour to persuade the world that the miseries of life outweigh its joys; but the way in which the vast majority of men cling to life contradicts them. Nor is the argument drawn from the miseries of life a very strong one at the best. One of the most clearly established facts among visible phenomena is the existence of a malevolent Power, thwarting the beneficent Will of the Creator. And a long observation of human history is bringing us ever more clearly to the conclusion that this very existence of evil is destined in the end to augment the sum of happiness which for the time it has poisoned.

27. This consideration is strengthened when we look at

* This is Sir John Herschell's view, stated in his *Astronomy*. It is beginning to be once more accepted by men of science, even those who are not believers in Christianity. Once more the point of attack is shifting, as the assailants have been beaten back. Mr. Spencer defines Force, which he terms the "ultimate of ultimates" (p. 169), as "a certain conditioned effect of the Unconditioned Cause—the relative reality indicating to us an Absolute Reality by which it is immediately produced." In other words, it is and is not the "ultimate of ultimates." Nor is it easy to see how either that which cannot exist without relation (for force cannot be conceived of except as acting on something or other) can indicate to us a Reality whose essence consists in independence of relation, or how what is independent of all relation can possibly "produce" anything, since production involves relation.

death itself. If we are not entitled to assume that the world is designed with consummate wisdom,* we are at least, I presume, justified in saying that the wisdom and goodness, as well as the power, with which it is contrived and kept in being, is somewhat in advance of these qualities, as they are found even in the highest and best human intellect. But a very ordinary human intellect would revolt at the injustice of implanting in man a conviction, or even of permitting a conviction to be almost universally prevalent, which was to him a source of delusive happiness and comfort. This is the case with the belief in immortality, which has existed in man in all ages, and under all conditions. If, with the late Professor Clifford, we ascribe this belief to the desire to live, we merely remove the difficulty a step. The world is not only ill, but very ill ordered, if a desire for life, so deep and unquenchable that it must needs cheat itself, always and everywhere, with such a figment of the imagination, is implanted in human nature only to be denied. Grant immortality, and you at once reconcile the difficulty of death with the goodness apparent elsewhere. Deny it, and you at once assume a cruelty for which no temporary favours bestowed on humanity can compensate. Even the death of animals, one of the greatest difficulties in the way of a belief in immortality, may best be explained in accordance with the phenomena of visible existence by supposing that the gift of life is only resumed, not destroyed; and it is by no means unreasonable to suppose that it may afterwards be manifested in other forms.†

28. Another argument for the belief that God is knowable is derived from the fact of conscience. This, Professor Clifford tells us, is the "experience of the tribe." But we have to deal with the fact that the "experience of the tribe,"—that is to

---

* J. Stuart Mill, *Three Essays on Religion*, p. 58.

† Theodore Parker (*Theism, Atheism, and the Popular Theology*, p. 198) cannot reconcile the idea of perfect benevolence in God with the idea of the mortality of animals, and the absence for them of retribution in another life. We have certainly better reasons for believing in the beneficence of God than for erecting the mortality of animals, a point on which we know nothing, into an article of faith. But the evidences we have of the benevolence of the Creator might surely be enough to induce us to trust Him, as reasonable men certainly would trust a fellow-creature who had given similar evidences of benevolence, in a case which is beyond our criteria of judging. Mr. Parker's words are worth notice: "I do not pretend to know how this is brought about" (*i.e.*, the disciplinary effect of pain leading to ultimate welfare); "I know not the middle terms which intermediate between the misery I see and the blessedness I imagine. I only know that the ultimate welfare must come to the mutilated beast overtasked by some brutal man."

say, the public opinion of the hour,—is always in the rear of the ultimate truths of morality. There has ever been a reserve of men who have not derived their conceptions of right and wrong from their fellow-men, but from some higher source. These have been the great teachers of morality, the salt of the earth, which has kept mankind from corruption, the pioneers of progress, and of the elevation of mankind. Whence were their ideas derived? What is the nature of that higher source from which those ideas have evidently been drawn? Is it entirely unphilosophical to suppose that here again we have a "manifestation" of the unseen Power, presenting "knowable likenesses and differences" to us, which we may "segregate into subject and object"? For conscience is apparently antecedent to experience. We can hardly imagine the first murderer to have been ignorant that he had committed a great wrong. And we may observe that the Scripture account of the first murder is psychologically accurate. The murderer is represented not merely as feeling remorse for an act, but as feeling responsibility to some "object," and that object what we call a Person. This sense of personal responsibility to a higher Power is intimately connected with the workings of conscience. It is from this source that its influence over mankind is derived. There are "knowable likenesses and differences" in ourselves to the moral "manifestations" of the "Unknowable Power" in the world around us, and conscience points them out. And therefore it were more philosophical to investigate its origin, and trace the laws of its working to their cause, than to adopt the eminently unscientific course of assuring us, upon no grounds whatsoever but the fancy of the speaker, that conscience, regarded as a sense of responsibility to a higher Power, is all a mistake.

29. Again, we see that in the visible universe there are an enormous number of laws and contrivances designed to secure the happiness of living creatures, and none, except such as may fairly come under the head of violations of those laws, calculated to destroy that happiness. With the origin of evil we do not now concern ourselves, save so far as to say that it has been almost universally regarded as the result of a violation of law. On the other hand, we have a sense of justice implanted in us which nothing but evil training can eradicate. These two considerations combined lead us irresistibly to the conviction, first, that justice is violated in human society as it at present exists, and next, that the Being who created the world must be able and willing to harmonise all inconsistencies and right all wrongs in the end. Here, again, comes in the idea of immortality. As Bishop Butler reminds us, we see

tendencies at work in human life calculated to produce certain results; but the life of the individual is too short to enable them to reach the end to which they were evidently tending. Our sense of something amiss, our moral disapprobation of the government of the world, can only be appeased by the conviction that here we see only a part of God's dealings with men, and that a part—possibly a very large part—of those dealings is carried on beyond the grave. Here, again, we are fairly within the limits of scientific research. We are reasoning on the "manifestations," the "knowable likenesses and differences" in the action of the Unseen Power. There is only one thing in which we differ from some scientific reasoners, and that is that we take in the case in all its bearings. We do not exclude the moral aspect of the question, either as it affects the individual man, or our ideas of Him from whom all morality proceeds. The fact that the world is in a state of probation appears to be written ineffaceably upon the history of man. By whom designed, and for what purposes, is a question which it cannot be scientific to ignore.

30. Nor can it be safe to put down all the spiritual experiences of the individual as so much fanaticism. This, too, would seem to be eminently unscientific, considering the vast part religion has played, and still plays, in the history of mankind. I have already ventured to express my disagreement with Mr. Spencer when he asserts that what are called "religious" ideas have gradually grown feebler as man has progressed in intelligence. I would venture to assert that the fundamental principles of religion, involving responsibility to a Higher Power; confidence in the love and protection of that Higher Power; the firm conviction that this Higher Power has our happiness and moral elevation as much in view as if no other being existed than ourselves,* were never more powerful factors in human thought than they are at present. As regards Christianity in particular, the sense of our need of some satisfaction for sin, other than what we ourselves can offer, though it has been quite needlessly exposed to a multitude of objections by a method of stating it not found in Scripture, continues to present itself to men as a moral necessity. I remarked here on a previous occasion that it would be hardly

---

* This feeling finds beautiful expression in Keble's *Christian Year*:—

"Thou art as much His care as if beside
Nor man nor angel lived in heaven or earth;
Thus sunbeams pour alike their glorious tide
To light up worlds, or wake an insect's mirth."
*Monday before Easter.*

consistent with the wisdom manifested in the present order of things, to suppose that the sense of awe, reverence, helplessness, dependence, which produce worship and incite to prayer, had been implanted in man without an object to which to direct themselves. A universal belief involves a universal need for that belief; a universal consciousness involves an object of that consciousness. Not more deeply seated in our nature, in spite of the attempts of some metaphysicians to overthrow that also, is the persuasion of our own existence, than is the universal conviction of the existence of God.

31. Nor is this all. We may appeal to the experience of the individual. This *may* be ill-grounded, but it is quite as possible on the whole that it is not. We do not, in these days of enlightenment at least, turn a deaf ear to the traveller who comes from foreign lands and relates the wonders he has seen there. Perhaps, when enlightenment has advanced a little further, those who have had no acquaintance with spiritual things may think it not unreasonable to listen to the experience of those who have. It is the usual character of a delusion to wear itself out, except among persons of great obstinacy and small intellectual power. How comes it, then, that so many men of the clearest intellect and highest character have reached the close of life with their convictions not shaken, but confirmed. We have heard of many sceptics who, late in life, have become Christians; but of how many Christians have we heard who have sacrificed their Christianity after many years' practical experience of its value? Comfort in trouble, strange and unexpected answers to prayer, the sense of a tender and loving guidance through life, the power to resist temptation, support on which we can rest in days of difficulty, a growing and deepening sense of the reality of the Unseen, these are some of the blessings which religion has to bestow. How real and deep these blessings are, this is not the place to declare. But is there a single genuine Christian who would fail to tell us that nothing on earth could compensate for their withdrawal? Is there one who would not tell you that he had the best of all proof,—*practical* proof, that they were the offspring of no delusion, but plain, literal, sober truth?

32. There is nothing which sceptical writers are so apt, I might say so anxious, to ignore, as the fact that these convictions are by no means those of the ignorant vulgar, nor are they riveted on the minds of the weak by the influences of priestcraft. Men of the highest intelligence in every walk of life, men of mind too independent and temperaments too calm to be impressed by imaginary terrors, are profound

believers in the existence of a moral governor of the world. This belief is partly founded on their own individual experience. They see that a higher wisdom than their own has been overruling their life, and find abundant reason for gratitude to that superintending providence for its fostering care. Many things which they had ignorantly desired have been withheld, and it is only after the lapse of years that they have discerned the reason. And thus the doctrine which they accepted upon trust in their earlier years has become the conviction of their matured experience. They call the Being in whose existence they believe a Personal God, not because they fully understand in every respect the way in which what we call Personality can be predicated of God, but because it is inferred from "manifestations" of the Unseen, which are "knowably like" to what we call "personality" in man.* There are certain phenomena in the visible world from which it appears reasonable to infer the existence of a Being Who exercises a kindly supervision over, — Who keeps up a friendly connexion with,—human beings. The word "personality" is used to express this "knowable relation." If it be metaphysically inadequate to express it, that need not trouble us. For every word we use is, as we have seen, metaphysically inadequate to express the idea it seeks to convey. And yet we do not cease to think, nor yet to speak, in matters of ordinary life. There is no more reason why we should cease to speak or think of God.

33. So far we have confined ourselves to Natural Religion. Now we have one word to say for Christianity. If there be one passion more intense than another with which humanity is endowed, it is the desire to know. And this passion is at its highest in reference to the problems of the future. The early Christian writers tell us how intense this craving was. The author of the Clementines depicts his hero as wasting away with his passionate desire to know something definite concerning the life beyond. Justin Martyr tells us how he rushed from teacher to teacher, but found that none but Christ could satisfy his longings. Can we suppose that the Creator of all has implanted this craving for no purpose but

---

* Dean Mansel tells us that "personality implies limitation," and that God is the unlimited. But we have seen that Revelation represents God as essentially limited in certain directions. Infinitely wise and good of course He is. But these very attributes limit His power to become other than wise and good. Therefore, even if personality does imply limitations, it is not on that account inconsistent with the idea of God. And so disappears an argument which has been freely employed of late.

to be denied? Or if we say that there is no Creator (which is more than we can prove), can we explain the existence of this craving in a world in which every other desire has a sphere for its fulfilment? Is man likely to be satisfied by the reply, "God is beyond your understanding, therefore don't try to think about Him"? We need not fear for Christianity. It is not likely to be in real danger so long as men who are asking for the bread of life are put off with the stone of Agnosticism. If men seek for information,—and they do still seek, nay, even yearn, for information,—concerning the world unseen, there is none for them, save in the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

34. And that revelation comes before us on evidence which, however warmly it be contested, is absolutely alone in its immense strength. The "threefold cord" of miracles, prophecy, and power to touch and satisfy the human heart, "cannot be broken." The evidence for the two former is misrepresented or evaded, but it is never fairly grappled with. No one has been able to tell us how it is that we are to reject evidence for these alleged historic facts, which is far stronger and more express than for any other historic facts whatsoever.* The way in which Christianity has resisted the incessant, continual, passionate attacks of its assailants must be evidence enough of the immense strength of its foundation. No other religion has ever resisted such attacks. And the secret of its strength is the way in which it brings the Divine to the level of our human comprehension. The author of *Natural Religion* has lately remarked that no religion could have any permanent hold on mankind which did not identify itself with humanity. Christianity has revealed God by displaying Him in a human form, that is, as the Scriptures tell us, in the image of God; in one of the "knowable likenesses" in which the "Unknowable" has "manifested" Himself. From the perfection of the human we may gain as complete a knowledge as to our limited intellects is possible of the perfection of the Divine. God becomes man, as the necessary step in the way of bringing man back to God.

35. There could be no greater confirmation of the truth of what has been said than an admission which Mr. Spencer very candidly makes towards the close of his argument. Christianity is rationally untenable, because the mystery which it professes to expound is "ultimate and absolute." But *we*

---

* No other historical facts are commemorated by such remarkable memorials as the Passover and the Eucharist, the latter of which has subsisted for above eighteen hundred, the former for more than three thousand years.

*cannot do without it.** It is necessary, for the present, as a factor in the moral education of the world. That is to say, that the false is necessary for the elucidation of the true. You cannot get men to act as they should without deceiving them. We have heard a great deal about the unworthy tricks of divines in dressing up phantoms in order to frighten mankind, and keep them under priestly influence. But now one of the most eminent philosophers of the day, himself no friend to Revelation, informs us that it is the only way to deal with men whose mental development is imperfect.† May we not, in all humility, venture to believe that it is the only way, because it is the true one? Can we be fairly condemned for holding that under no circumstances can falsehood lead to truth? An imperfect belief may lead to a more perfect one; but a belief fundamentally unphilosophical, ungrounded, and absurd, must be utterly renounced before one step is taken towards the truth. From Mr. Herbert Spencer's own admissions, therefore, we may find some reason for the belief that it is vain to preach "righteousness and temperance" without a reference to "judgment to come," and vain to try to influence men by the terrors of that judgment, without pointing them to One Who can save them, not only from its penalties, but from their cause.

36. We have now given some reasons for the belief that, though we cannot know all about God, we may know something about Him. Partial knowledge is not the same thing as no knowledge at all. Our ideas are not "speculatively false" because they are speculatively inadequate. All knowledge consists of successive approximations to the truth. We are all of us familiar with calculations based on the ratio of the diameter of a circle to its circumference, and on the extraction of roots of numbers which are not complete squares. Carried on to as many places of decimals as the nicety of the operation requires, the most valuable practical results are attained from premises which are speculatively defective. Similarly, in infinite series, we take as many terms as are

---

* *First Principles*, p. 122. "We cannot avoid the inference that they are needful accompaniments of human life . . . . elements in that great evolution of which the beginning and the end are beyond our knowledge and conception." But it is remarkable that many who take upon themselves to expound Mr. Spencer's doctrines have nothing but contempt for that to which he esteems it a duty to extend "the widest possible toleration."

† "As certainly as a barbarous race needs a harsh terrestrial rule, and habitually shows attachment to a despotism capable of the necessary rigour, so certainly does such a race need a belief that is similarly harsh, and habitually shows attachment to such a belief."—*First Principles*, p. 119.

needed for our purpose, and neglect the remainder as practically of no importance. Space, again, is infinite; or rather, we seem incapable of conceiving it as otherwise. Yet we know a great deal about the distance of the heavenly bodies, their size, the materials of which they are composed, the conditions under which they exist. Nor, because we are unable to answer all questions suggested by their existence, do we cast aside all that we do know as worthless. Once more, we do not doubt the existence of Force. Yet the doctrine of the existence of Force simply depends upon the fact that it is the only explanation satisfactory to the intellect which has been given of natural phenomena. We speak of observation as the basis of knowledge. But Force itself has never been observed. Its existence is only an induction from facts ascertained by observation. And our belief in its existence is confirmed by the circumstance that when assumed it is possible to deduce the phenomena from it.

37. The idea of God has a stronger claim on our acquiescence than this. Not only is it the conclusion to which the intellect of mankind in general is irresistibly led by the phenomena of nature in the widest sense of the word; not only is it, when assumed, a thoroughly rational and intelligible, and to most intellects a satisfactory, explanation of the phenomena; but it is witnessed to by the all but universal consciousness of mankind. That is to say, it stands upon the same basis as all phenomena whatever. If we may not assume the existence of that of which we are conscious, all existence whatsoever disappears like the "baseless fabric of a vision." Thus, the idea of God is eminently scientific. It affords an explanation of phenomena, and at the same time it is felt, or, rather rationally concluded, to be at the root of all phenomena. It rests alike upon an objective and subjective basis.* And like scientific truth, moreover, it is capable of verification. But such verification must consist first of all in assuming its truth, and acting upon the assumption by applying it to facts. A man who refused to accept the first principles of science would be eternally precluded from

---

* Thus, it will be seen that it is not intended to assert that belief in God depends entirely on external observation. Inward intuition is by no means excluded. But in the case of those whose inward intuition is defective, outward means may be resorted to in order to restore it. If we cannot discern Him as we should by the eye of the soul, we may still see the "invisible things of Him" by "those that are made." For the intuitions of the soul, when in spiritual health, and the conclusions of the reason mutually correspond.

arriving at truth. He must take them at first on trust from other men, and then by diligent application of them to phenomena he will arrive at an independent conviction of their accuracy. Such is eminently the case with religious truth. He who scoffs at it as absurd will remain, as long as he does so, a stranger to the knowledge of the Unseen. He who accepts it on the authority of persons he can trust will find continually, as he applies it to the facts of existence, fresh reasons for acknowledging its truth. Like all other knowledge, it passes from the stage of belief on authority, through that of experimental inquiry, into that of rational conviction. If this be said to be contrary to facts, it may be replied that such contradiction is only apparent. Those who have made shipwreck of their faith have usually done so at the very moment when they were first in a condition to act independently and intelligently upon the principles they had been taught. Instead of applying those principles to practice, and thus ascertaining whether they were an adequate solution of the problems of life, they have demanded to investigate the whole question, *ab initio*, for themselves. Life is not long enough for such a process. Those who undertake it must not be surprised if life be wasted in it, if the arrogance which treats with contempt the experience of other men should need a bitter lesson to convince it that no man in this world can venture to stand alone. It is a most significant fact, the practical importance of which cannot be overrated, that no man has taken the doctrines of Christianity as a basis for conduct, and acted upon them consistently for a long series of years, and has been forced at the end to confess that they have failed. Thousands, on the other hand, have recoiled from the abyss of uncertainty which lies before them in the shape of Agnosticism. It is not logic, it is the result of experiment, which makes a man of mature age a Christian, and keeps him so. The feeling that something more than a negative conception of God as the Unknowable is necessary to support him through the perplexities and sorrows of life, may often be the means of leading him to embrace revealed religion. But experience does not lead him to surrender his new convictions as delusive. Rather do those convictions gather strength as life advances, and as fresh demonstrations of Eternal Wisdom and Love open out upon the soul. And so, as in the lapse of the ages it continues to store up within the limits of its experience new "manifestations" of the Divine, it passes gradually from the "knowledge in part" which characterises our existence here, to that "knowledge even as we are known," which constitutes the perfection of humanity.

The CHAIRMAN (Rev. R. Thornton, D.D., V.P.).—It seems unnecessary to ask the meeting to allow me to tender their thanks for the exceedingly able and interesting paper which has just been read. (Applause.) I hope we shall now have a good discussion upon the subject.*

Rev. Prebendary Row, M.A.—The difficulty I feel in dealing with the paper before us is, that I do not think it contains five lines as to which I have to express disapprobation. In fact, I cordially hail this paper as one of the best I have ever seen; and so strong is my opinion of its excellence, that I would certainly recommend the Council of the Institute, if they do this year publish a People's Edition, to take care that it shall contain this identical paper. The reason why I recommend such a course is this: I was talking last Saturday with my publisher, who is acquainted with Mr. Herbert Spencer, and he told me, to my great surprise, that among the artisan class there is a considerable circulation of Mr. Spencer's works. I was the more surprised to hear this when I remembered that Mr. Spencer's books are full of hard words and technical phrases; and I should not have thought that they were likely to be read by men of the class referred to. Of course, I cannot gainsay what I was told, but there seems to be little doubt that such works are the main cause of the unbelief which exists at the present moment in this country. There is no doubt that an unbelief founded on his system has obtained possession of the minds of large numbers of the upper classes; and the inferior minds readily accept the doctrines put before them, not so much because they are able to understand the principles on which they are based, as because they follow the example set them by their superiors. (Hear, hear.) I think I may say that there are no books now published which are doing more mischief to the cause of religion than the books of Mr. H. Spencer. (Hear, hear.) This is the more remarkable because, I think that, although the books themselves are large, they do not require a very large amount of reasoning and argument to crumble their conclusions to the dust. There are a great many books that necessarily require large books to answer them; but Mr. Spencer can be effectually answered without the necessity of writing a thick volume. I may say, with regard to what Mr. Lias has put forward relative to Dean Mansel's work, that I cordially endorse what he says. I was acquainted with Dean Mansel, yet cannot but feel that his work has been attended by most serious consequences to the cause of religious truth, although it was undoubtedly published with the intention of defending truth. This is a most remarkable fact. Dean Mansel, doubtless, thought that he could use the weapons of unbelief in order to crush unbelief, but he forgot that, in using a weapon of this kind, it could be wielded with equal effect against Revelation as against Atheism. I admit that Herbert Spencer does not deny, abstractedly, the existence of a being which

* Previously to the commencement of the discussion the Hon. Secretary read several letters from leading members expressing approval of the paper, and trusting it will be widely useful. Amongst those since received is one from Bishop Harold Browne, saying, "I think it very able and good," and adding the expression of his wish to become a supporter of the Institute.—ED.

he calls God; but at the same time his principles are practically those of Atheism, although not theoretically so,—I mean his is practical, as distinct from theoretical, Atheism ; a system of belief which teaches that I may go from one end of life to the other without any regard to the existence of God; and, further, a system which denies the moral freedom of man. But, turning to Dean Mansel's book, there is one point which I think requires a little more elaboration than Mr. Lias has given to it. Dean Mansel denied that we can obtain any really abstract idea of God, because, as God is infinite and all our conceptions finite, it is impossible that God can be conceived by the finite mind. But as he puts it, although we cannot get this conception by means of our natural faculties, we can get it by Revelation. This, I think, is a mistake that lies at the bottom of the Dean's position. Let us take an illustration. He lays down, as a fundamental truth, that because God is infinite, and we are finite, we cannot get any real conception of God ; and I fully agree that all attempts to explain the ontology of God in terms of the finite intellect of man must be futile. Dean Mansel thought that he had proved through this position the necessity for Revelation; but the same reason, which renders me incapable of forming a conception of God through the finite character of my intellect, would also render me incapable of forming a conception of God by Revelation. Let me take an illustration: a pint measure merely holds a pint of liquid; and, because it is so conditioned that it is only a pint measure, it is impossible to get a gallon into it. Just in the same way, because the intellect is so conditioned that we cannot get an adequate conception of God into it, so must it be if we try to get into it the same conception by way of Revelation. Dean Mansel has also spoken of a regulative idea of God. Let us see what is meant by such a conception. The revealed conceptions of God, being inadequate representations of His actual character, are intended to be regulative of our conduct, *i.e.*, we are to act as though they were the adequate and true ones. But we do not, in the long run, require to know what duty is ; but what we want in Revelation is some spiritual or moral power to make the performance of duty possible. The essence of the Christian revelation is, that it has revealed a spiritual and moral power which has rendered duty a possibility to man, and which the whole range of pagan philosophy has utterly failed to reach. Some years ago, I quoted in this room the very words used by Aristotle, who tells us he did not think that his principles of ethics would have any effect whatever, except among the higher classes of mankind. The passage will be found in the seventh book. But Christianity has come and given us, in the Revelation of Jesus Christ, a moral and spiritual power which has rendered duty possible to all. What is the use of a regulative idea of God? I cannot love a regulative idea of anything, and it is absurd to talk to me of doing so. If you tell me that God's justice is a mere regulative idea, and that the justice of God may be a very different thing from my conception of justice, then I say that no man can feel respect and reverence for a regulative idea of justice. I can only love realities, not shadows or delusions.

This seems to me to be destructive of Mansel's position. It seems never to have occurred to the author of the work referred to, that the principle he lays down denies the possibility of man being made in the image of God, and even of the Incarnation. The Scripture tells us that Jesus Christ is the moral image of God, and I wish to know how it is possible He can be the moral image of God if God as He really exists is absolutely and entirely unknowable, and all our conceptions of Him are merely regulative. Dean Mansel ought to have seen that, if all real knowledge of God is impossible, it would be wholly impossible for Jesus Christ in human nature to be a revelation of the Invisible God. His positions, therefore, raise enormous difficulties, and I cannot help candidly admitting, on reading Herbert Spencer's works, that, if the principles thus put forward are true, they lay the axe at the root of all possible religion. (Hear, hear.) When we come to look at the principles themselves, it seems to me that it cannot but be plain to the comprehension of the most ordinary person that they are without foundation. I am prepared to admit that no human faculty can penetrate into the great question of the ontology of God. So far, I believe, this discussion is showing us that there are things beyond which the human intellect cannot penetrate. These depths go beyond the powers of a finite intellect to fathom ; and probably there will never be such an intellect in the universe as will be able to deal adequately with these points. But this does not prevent us from dealing with the facts treated of in this paper. It does not follow that, because I cannot grasp in the infinity of God, therefore I am unable to attain any knowledge of him which is real. I question whether it is right to apply the term infinite to the moral attributes of God ; but, if one says God is infinitely good, it does not follow that, because we cannot penetrate into the abstract idea of infinite goodness, therefore we cannot tell what the term "good" means when applied to God. Of course, I am aware that we have to encounter the objection of anthropomorphism when we apply these ideas to God ; but there is no idea we can have of God that is not anthropomorphic, and it cannot be otherwise, because we are human beings ; and all the ideas conceived by man must necessarily be anthropomorphic, because they are simply human ideas. When we use the term anthropomorphism in a derogatory sense is when we apply the imperfections and passions of man to God. This is what was done by the pagan mythologists. No doubt, this is most objectionable, but we can only conceive of God at all under human images, and consequently it is absurd to say that, because we use human conceptions, we are degrading the Deity. This objection charges us with applying human ideas to God ; but our reply is, We are able to conceive of God under human ideas and forms of thought because God made man in His Own Image. I defy any one to show that the difficulty is not quite as great on the one side as on the other. When we are told that we cannot form a true conception of God because He is Infinite, Absolute, and Unconditioned, I reply that these are merely metaphysical conceptions that have no existence outside the human mind. The great thing is, to give up, once for all, all these cloudy metaphysics. Let us deal with facts.

We are told by Herbert Spencer that there is an inscrutable Power of which we cannot know anything, but of which the universe contains manifestations. This being so, I want to know, if the universe is a manifestation of this power, how can it be said that we know nothing of this power? (Hear, hear.) And if God is a Power operating in every manifestation of nature, or rather a force behind every operation of nature, then we clearly do get some knowledge of this unknowable Power, and it is absurd to say that it is otherwise. Consequently we may learn a great deal about God from these manifestations, and may also have a great many of our *à priori* prepossessions about Him to unlearn. It is undoubtedly true, that the created universe is a revelation of God, and the human conscience is also a revelation of God,—God speaking to man as to what constitutes right. But Jesus Christ, our Lord, is the greatest moral manifestation of God. I wish to add, that the kind of philosophy we have been criticising has conferred on us great benefit in regard to the innumerable controversies of the past. The great controversies about the Trinity in the third, fourth, fifth, sixth, and seventh centuries touched points beyond the range of human intellect to fathom. Any person may satisfy himself of the inscrutable character of such controversies if he will read the discussions of the Council of Florence on the points which, even at this day, form the ground of separation between the Oriental and Occidental Churches.

Professor S. E. O'DELL.—There is one question I should like to ask. Suppose we put this query to ourselves—Is it possible for us not to know God? Is it possible for us, even if we bring all our intellectual capabilities to our aid, to put out of our minds the knowledge we have of God? Is it possible for us to get even from an assemblage of children the answer that it is possible not to know God? Suppose we went into an assemblage of savages, who have not been taught Christianity, and put the question to them, in the most minute and forcible manner—Would it be possible for them not to know God? In each case you would find the reply you would get is—"All of us, more or less, do know God; all of us, more or less, acknowledge the existence of God." With regard to how much we know God, that is another question. It is a matter of degree. There are many here, no doubt, who know God more than I do, and there are many outside who know Him less than I do. We are not discussing the degree of our knowledge, but rather the question of this paper reversed—Is it possible for us not to know God? I think, with the rev. gentleman who has just spoken so intelligently, that it is a matter of impossibility for us not to know God; but probably Herbert Spencer, and those of his school as it has now arisen, would, on self-examination, say: "We do know God, because we have been taught, in our infancy and youth, that there is such a Being, and the knowledge has come into our minds in that way; but, beyond what we have thus been taught, we do not acknowledge God." Through all nationalities and people, whatever their language and tongue, there is a knowledge of God; and this is shown by the reverence and worship they pay to Him, more or less. Now there is one other question I should like to put, and

that is—Why is it that we know God? Is it because of our intelligence? If so, all intelligent men must know God; and in accordance with the development of our intelligence, so must be our knowledge of God. But then comes the question—Is Herbert Spencer a fool or an idiot? We all acknowledge that he is a man of high intelligence, an accepted reasoner and philosopher; and that, therefore, if a knowledge of God depends upon intelligence, Herbert Spencer must acknowledge God. The question is then—Is he dishonest? Certainly we cannot come to this conclusion, as we have no reason for doing so. Therefore, we must conclude that the knowledge of God does not depend upon our intelligence. Upon what, then, does it depend? The only conclusion we can come to is this—that our knowledge must depend on a faculty of the mind, which we all possess, which God has given us, and by which we are absolutely bound to acknowledge Him. If it depended on intelligence, then Herbert Spencer must acknowledge God more than the poor woman who reads her Bible in her cottage or garret. This poor woman may not be altogether void of intelligence, but she has not the intelligence of Herbert Spencer. Nevertheless, she acknowledges God because she possesses a faculty which absolutely compels her to worship Him. If we look at human nature we shall find that this knowledge is a matter of compulsion, and that we cannot get away from it. Let us leave this place, and try to put God out of our thoughts, and we shall not be able to do so. If next Sunday, or to-night, we should find, on opening our Bibles, every word obliterated, still we should have a knowledge of God; and even if all the teachings of Christianity were obliterated, we should still worship Him, because God has put into our minds a witness of Himself which is entirely independent of reason. Reason may turn so absolutely idiotic, as to worship everything and anything in animate or inanimate nature; but there is a faculty of the mind that will compel us, whether we like it or not, to worship God—and because this faculty is possessed by all men, not all the teachings of all the philosophers combined can ever eradicate the desire to worship God. As well might they try and teach us that it is foolish to eat and drink, as teach us it is foolish to worship God, because to do so seems to me, from all I know of human nature, to be a matter of absolute necessity. (Applause.)

Mr. Woods Smith (a Visitor).—I desire to say a word or two, because I have been afraid it might be thought the innocent were being slain with the guilty. Mr. Lias acknowledges that there are some true things in Herbert Spencer's works, and I do also, although, like Mr. Lias, I am a Christian. I learn that I cannot find out God by searching and investigating and thinking, or by any effort of my mind or heart; and that if God is to be known, He can only be known by His revealing Himself to me. If Mr. Spencer were here to-night, I believe he would say: "I agree with you there." He says, with regard to this power of which we speak, no limits must be assigned to it. If I were to say to him: "You do not, therefore, limit the possibility of that Power revealing itself to you or to me?" I think he would say: "Certainly not." Here, then, Herbert

Spencer is advancing one of the grandest truths of the Bible. Mr. Lias has quoted those passages as to how we cannot find out God by searching; how man by wisdom knows not God; and how no man knoweth the Father save through the Son, and him to whom the Son is revealed. Therefore, we are brought face to face with this fact—that science, after thousands of years of investigation, has put its foot on one of the first and foundation truths of the Bible. This is a grand thing, and not to be roughly handled or accepted. We all, as Christians, acknowledge it as a fundamental thing, that no knowledge of God is real doctrine beyond that which St. Paul speaks of in Romans, and which puts forward what Herbert Spencer says himself. We have knowledge of God's power and eternity, but not of Himself. But I think we might go far, very far, with Herbert Spencer. Mr. Lias has said there are no words in the Bible which speak of the infinity of God. He might have remembered that there is the Hebrew word to which Eusebius alluded, which expresses the infinity and eternity of God; and that, if you say that God is not infinite or unconditioned, you might go on and say He is not Almighty. But the Lord God is Almighty, and Infinite, and Eternal. These things we cannot fully understand; but we do understand that He can reveal and make Himself known to us. I was thinking just now that we sometimes meet men who tell us: "I am not going to church; I can go out into the fields and woods and meditate about God." We also find men who say: "We know nothing about God"; and if any one should say this to Spencer, Spencer would merely say: "You cannot find Him." But if he went to the pastor, and said: "How can I find Him?" the answer would be: "If you seek Him He will reveal Himself to you." The Bible says: "To know Him is eternal life"; so that if you could get a knowledge of God from the outside world, that would give eternal life. But you cannot do this, and it is this external knowledge that Mr. Spencer tries to teach.

Rev. C. L. Engström.—It has occurred to me that, speaking of the unknowable, it would be a good plan to dwell upon that which is akin to knowledge in a lower sphere, because we are better able to understand things beneath us than those above us. We cannot, indeed, speak of a particle of matter having knowledge of an adjoining particle; but if we bring two particles into contact, that contact is in those particles something corresponding to knowledge. Let us take the old comparison of a child filling its cup from the ocean. There can be no harm in using so trite an illustration. The cup is brought into contact with the ocean, and if you could conceive such a thing as that both were gifted with intelligence, you would say that the two things in contact knew each other. But, coming to higher things, we do not think that the knowledge of God is nothing more than that. It must be much higher; because the knowledge of God is necessarily a far greater thing than a knowledge of matter. Let us take something with life in it. Let us consider the plant as it grows up from the tiny seed which gives it birth, and we shall perceive that, as it passes through its various stages of development and evolution, it comes every moment into new contact with its varied and varying environment; then, if we could suppose it to be possessed of

intelligence, each moment of fresh contact would also give a proportionately new knowledge of its environment. Here we see that, although this is a subject beneath us and therefore easier of comprehension, it is, at the same time, one which is difficult to grasp; for even this is almost, perhaps quite, beyond the limits of our comprehension. We can understand much better the illustration of the cup and the ocean than that of the plant, for, in the latter, besides the physical, there is a chemical and vital process. Lord Bacon has suggested that there is some analogy between the trust and attachment of a dog to its master and the faith and love which exist in the case of man towards God. Suppose we take these two last illustrations together, and say that our knowledge of God is the consciousness of the fuller life given us by God as the latter grows up into contact with the Divine life around it, and that the relation between us and God is somewhat like that between the dog and its master, that is, between a dependent being and somebody above it trusted and loved. If there be any real likeness between these things, then, as we cannot with our limited faculties thoroughly understand the lower relation between the plant and its environment, we see at once, with regard to that higher relation, that it is a thing entirely beyond our comprehension—a thing which we all instinctively feel and are certain of, but of which anything like mathematical proof would be impossible. A thing may be true, and we may know it to be true, but we may at the same time see, from the nature of the case, that our knowledge is not capable of mathematical demonstration. Knowledge is, in fact such a complex and mysterious relation, that it is difficult to understand how it comes about in the simplest things; but in regard to higher spheres the relation is so much more complex, that it would be impossible to explain it in the sense in which Mr. Spencer seems to think we ought to explain our knowledge of God. Let us take another instance, for we are almost forced to use analogies to justify our acceptance of anything which we account to be reasonable. We have just heard of the poor woman in her cottage, and of how she knows God, or of how she thinks she knows Him, and seems to live by that knowledge; now, in case any one should come to her and say it is all a mistake, I have tried to show you that it would be impossible to fully analyse her faith, and that, therefore, we can only go to another analogy from which we may judge as to whether it is reasonable or not. The analogy given to us *in the Bible* is much higher than any *I* have mentioned. I have spoken of a plant, and an animal; but our relation to God, revealed to us by Jesus Christ, is of a far nobler character, for it is the relation of a child to its parent. Consider the condition of a newly-born child as it hangs on its mother's breast: in that case we know that the infant can have but an infinitesimal knowledge of its mother. It has but a slight and limited material contact as it hangs there; but, as the child grows, its perceptions and faculties begin to be evolved and developed, until it has the knowledge which a child eventually obtains of its parent. Now, if the Bible be true, and God is truly our Father, we, men and women, though His children, cannot expect to grow up even to such a knowledge of Him

as the child has of its mother. We learn from the Bible that men are brought by creation into the lower position in regard to God resembling the relation between the infant and its mother, very close to God, but knowing very little of Him. Then by the mysterious discipline of Providence, we may be said to be, as it were, weaned from this lower position. What then happens? In the place of that merely material knowledge which the child has at first, it comes as it begins to grow and to acquire knowledge, to know its mother's mind, and heart, and will, and it seems to me that in the process of His revelation of Himself *we* obtain the same kind of knowledge of *God*. It is with the race as it is with the individual,—through the revelation of God in Jesus Christ, that we come to know more and more of Him. But the point which I am now mainly insisting upon is this, that, if the relation between us and God be of the kind I have been describing, our knowledge of Him, whether much or little, must be in its nature so infinitely complex and mysterious a relation, that it would be impossible for any being less than God to understand how the knowledge comes about and how the relation exists. To *know* is one thing, to know *how* we know is quite another. With regard to Mr. Spencer, although I have not read much of his writings, and therefore it is not right for me to be too sure in my criticism or praise of his philosophy, I think the last speaker was greatly in the right when he said we ought not altogether to condemn him. His philosophy is of two kinds — the materialistic philosophy of "atoms" and "force," which, we hold, are totally insufficient to account for the production of what we see around us, and then, this agnostic philosophy by which he teaches that we do not know anything about God. Is it not possible that one element in the prevalent Agnosticism of the day is a genuine humility and reverence for the mystery which surrounds us on all sides? Such humility and reverence are "*not far from* the kingdom of God," but they need to be quickened by faith to bring men *into* it. The better Agnosticism may be likened to a child yet unborn,—it has "come to the birth, but there is not strength to bring forth,"—but, should the soul believe in Jesus Christ, the Revealer of that Being Whom it yearns to know, it would be born into the spiritual world. There humility and reverence are indispensable both to life and to knowledge, and the once agnostic would find that the things which the Eternal Wisdom has "hid from the wise and prudent" are "revealed unto babes." (Hear, hear.)

Mr. W. Griffith.—It is a great gain to know from Herbert Spencer that he thinks the First Cause is unthinkable. It is on account of the ill consequences which arise from his writings that it is necessary to consider somewhat more fully his claims as a new teacher. I quite agree with Prebendary Row, that we are much indebted to Mr. Lias for his able statement of the whole question; but, while I agree with him so far, I must differ from the view he takes of metaphysics. The learned Prebendary tells us that in metaphysics we are in a mere cloudland. If this be so, we are not likely to receive any great amount of light from that region; but, on the other hand, is not logic itself a part of metaphysics? Are

there not sublimer truths than those taught directly by physics? Is there nothing which transcends the science of the chemist and the naturalist? Granting that material man belongs to physics, is there no such person as an intellectual man? no such evidence as the human soul? If there is, surely the problems connected therewith, which form part of the province of metaphysics, are of greater importance than the classification of vegetables and animals. But that there is such an existence the wise of all ages and of all countries, the common-sense of those around us, all admit. But the human soul is neither earth, air, fire, nor water, nor any element which the chemist has discovered. These elements are not susceptible of memory intelligence, or thought; they retain no knowledge of past events, they reason not on the present, nor foresee the future. These faculties may act through the brain, but they are distinct therefrom in their essence. Finite in their origin, limited in their capacity, yet uniform in their characteristics, they must have emanated from a greater, from a free and pure mind, free from mortal conviction, yet possessing an eternal principle of action. I intend not with Bishop Butler to discuss what gratitude is, or to show that veneration is a native quality of the soul; nor with other philosophers to expound its state when it is truly happy. But, as a mere matter of fact, I can but think it possible to apply Lord Bacon's system of induction to spiritual and moral phenomena around us, which are the material of metaphysics, as well as to the other works of creation. I agree with Prebendary Row in saying that we cannot fully understand the ontology of the Supreme Being, for the finite qualities and faculties of man are inferior to the infinite; but, while we cannot fully understand the nature, we may know the existence of that Supreme Being, without being able to comprehend the Infinity, the Wisdom, the Power, and the Majesty of God. Mr. Spencer tells us that the "inscrutable power which is manifested to us through all phenomena transcends intuition and is beyond imagination." In this sentence he makes another admission, which will be of great advantage to us in this controversy. He admits that there is a Power which manifests itself through all phenomena—inscrutable, it may be, but still a Power, the existence of which is acknowledged. It is true also that it may transcend intuition, and be beyond imagination, but yet the existence of this Power may still remain. I think the Rev. Prebendary Row hardly did justice to the works of Aristotle. It may be that Aristotle thought the people at large would not comprehend his notions of a Deity; but it is an undoubted fact that Aristotle himself, and the people of the great and learned world in which he lived, did adopt the notions he put forth. It may be true that Aristotle did not think the people at large would accept these views; but that arose from the feeling with which he regarded the populace and from his dislike to the vulgar mob,—

> Odi profanum vulgus et arceo:
> Favete linguis: carmina non prius
> Audita, Musarum sacerdos
> Virginibus puerisque canto.—Horace, *Odes*, iii. 1.

Then, again, with regard to the great writers among the Romans, Cicero himself, writing of the power of the gods,—while he ignored and despised the many superstitions around him,—did contend that no man of any talent or power of comprehension would deny the existence of a Supreme Being. "Cicero maintained," his classic biographer tells us, "that there was one God or supreme Being, incorporeal, eternal, self-existent, who created the world by His power, and sustained it by His providence. This he inferred from the consent of all nations, the order and beauty of the heavenly bodies, the evident marks of counsel, wisdom, and a fitness to certain ends observable in the whole and in every part of the visible world; and declares that person unworthy of the name of man who can believe all this to have been made by chance, when with the utmost stretch of human wisdom we cannot penetrate the wisdom which contrived it." (1 *Tusculan*, 27; *De Natura Deorum*, iii. 3; 2 *Middleton*, 340). In his beautiful Tusculan Disputations he argues, and argues forcibly, from the nature of God, from the immortality of the soul, that those who are good and well instructed ought not to fear death, but account it a blessing, as an exodus from a world of change, as an entrance into one of permanent happiness. I merely advance these topics to show that we have other arguments than those already brought forward in proof of the existence of a Supreme Creator. In fact, if we take all the languages of the present day, we find a universal assent among mankind to the belief that such a Being does exist. Take the French, the German, the English, or any other language, and ask yourselves, how are you to account for the origin of all those terms which relate to the Deity, unless there is the universal assent of all the nations speaking those languages to the idea that there is a Supreme Being? While adding these few arguments to those which others have advanced, I certainly must say that I agree in the assertion that it is also a question of history. We have received a revelation, and that revelation does confirm those ideas which have been put forward on the subject by the greatest writers of all times. Looking on the matter in this light, I think there can be but one answer given to the question propounded by Mr. Lias —"Is it possible to know God?"—namely, that, according to the universal evidence, that knowledge *is* possible in some degree. (Applause.)

Mr. D. Howard, V.P.I.C.—It appears to me that this paper is one of the very best that could have been brought before a society like this, which has to deal with the errors of Herbert Spencer's philosophy. Three hundred years ago Bacon had to protest against the misrepresentation of Aristotle's as it was then taught; and I must say that I think Dean Mansel, has suffered almost as severely at the hands of his professed followers, Herbert Spencer and others, as ever Aristotle did. It is one thing to say, "You can never have a full knowledge of God, before whom the seraphim veil their faces"; it is another thing to say, "You can know nothing about God, therefore do not worship Him." Hence its intention surely was to teach that you can never so know God as to be able to sit in

judgment upon His revealed will, a very different thing from saying that you cannot so know God as to receive a revelation from Him. I must say that I wish Mr. Spencer and his school would be a little more consistent, and would learn how little they know of *noumena*, and how entirely our knowledge is confined to phenomena. If, with all these doctrines of the conservation of force, and the other scientific dicta that are advanced and received as absolute revelations of truth, our opponents would only see that every word they say about the difficulty of accepting religion is far more true about these would-be scientific declarations, I think a great deal of good would be effected; but even though we may not accept, but regard as misconceptions, some of the views which have been expressed about Dean Mansel's philosophy, let us not be ready to admit that we cannot know God. It is true that we cannot know Him entirely; but, after all, there is a great deal of regulative truth, which is far from being absolute truth, and it is well we should remember that our conception of God is imperfect, and that when we have to argue, not with Mr. Spencer, but with another school of unbelievers, as to this or that point being inconceivable, we shall then require this argument. It is quite another matter in dealing with the Spencer school. I think that this paper gives us a sound and wise and true method of philosophy or theology—the inductive method. It deals with the question from the experience we have and the knowledge we derive from the phenomena around us, and argues from these with irresistible force. These high flights of metaphysics are more convenient to use as arguments to defend a foregone conclusion than to persuade our own minds. There are, unfortunately, those who *will not* know God. They cast about for reasons, as we find in their metaphysical books; but I believe in the majority of cases the desire is *not* to know God, and I think in this we find a great fact to be remembered in dealing with many of the sceptics of the present day, namely, that there is not the desire to know, and, therefore, there never can be any true knowledge. (Applause.)]

Mr. H. C. DENT.—A speaker who has just left the room has mentioned the word "evolution." In the sense in which that word is very often used, and in which I think it has absolutely no meaning, the doctrine is one in which we cannot believe. The doctrine of evolution is, I believe, to be interpreted as meaning that a living creature naturally makes advances, however infinitesimal, towards a higher condition than that of its predecessor. To speak of a child's perceptions and faculties being evolved, is, therefore, erroneous, because, when we speak of a child and the enlargement of his intellectual and physical powers, we do not mean that they are growing beyond those of his predecessor, but that they are simply increasing with the child's natural growth. I desired to offer this remark, because the words "evolution" and "evolved" are very frequently used in contradictory senses.

The CHAIRMAN.—I will now, as chairman, take the liberty of saying a few words on what is to me a rather delicate subject. I have heard the name of Dean Mansel very often referred to. He was my tutor and my

personal friend, and, therefore, I may claim to know something of his mind. I am quite sure that, had he been spared, he would have brought out a wonderful work of positive Christian philosophy, ethical and metaphysical, and have given us the affirmative side of that of which we now have only the negative. Therefore, I ask all those who study him and hear about him, to remember that we have only had from him one half, and that while, we can consider that half, the other half is withheld from us. As to the able paper of Mr. Lias, before I ask him to reply to the remarks made upon it, I must congratulate him on the way in which he has hit the right nail on the head. He has shown, I think, distinctly, the fallacy which lies at the root of the Agnostic theory, which is, the confusion that is made between knowledge and comprehension. We cannot comprehend God, because the finite cannot take in the Infinite; but we can know God, because we can know something of Him. To use Prebendary Row's illustration, I can get out of a gallon of water a pint very easily, and the pint may be exceedingly good water; but Herbert Spencer and the Agnostic school seem to argue that, because I cannot put the whole of the gallon into my pint pot, I cannot get any at all, and consequently cannot drink. I say I am able to know something of God, because like apprehends like, and I know I am made in the image of God—that my intellect is a representation of God's intellect, and, though inferior to it, is of the same kind and nature. But although we are able to know something about God, we must, as Christians, freely admit that we cannot comprehend God, because He who is Infinite cannot be restrained by the limits of the intellect of His own creatures. (Applause.)

The meeting was then adjourned.

---

## REMARKS BY THE (LATE) RIGHT HON. THE LORD O'NEILL.

The Rev. J. J. Lias's paper appears to me to contain some very valuable observations on Mr. Herbert Spencer's theories. He has well and clearly pointed out the inconsistency of that author in rejecting the doctrine of a personal Creator of the universe, on account of the apparent contradictions in which we find ourselves involved when we endeavour to frame a concept of the Absolute or the Infinite, and yet acknowledging the existence of space, time, matter, motion, and force, with respect to which he maintains that we are beset by similar difficulties. Mr. Spencer admits that there must be a first cause, to which, however, he denies personality. He even corrects Sir William Hamilton and Dean Mansel, on account of that very sceptical tendency of their reasoning of which Mr. Lias justly complains. Their mistake, according to him, consists in asserting that in such antinomies of thought, as relative and non-relative (or absolute), equal and

unequal, &c., the reality of one of the contradictories is *nothing else than* a negation of the other. "The negative concept," he says ("First Principles," p. 90), "contains something besides the negation of the positive one. Take, for example, the limited and the unlimited. Our notion of the limited is composed, first, of a consciousness of some kind of being, and, secondly, of a consciousness of the limits under which it is known. In the antithetical notion of the unlimited, the consciousness of limits is abolished, but not the consciousness of some kind of being. . . . . The error consists in assuming that consciousness contains *nothing but* limits and conditions, to the entire neglect of that which is limited and conditioned. It is forgotten that there is something which alike forms the raw material of definite thought, and remains after the definiteness which thinking gave it has been destroyed."

Thus Mr. Spencer admits that the unlimited has some kind of existence, and so of the unconditioned, the infinite, and the absolute. In short, he holds that there is a First Cause, but maintains that it is impossible for us to have any knowledge of it whatever. But notwithstanding its being thus utterly unknowable, he professes to know one thing about it at any rate, and that is, that it is impersonal. Dean Mansel, on the other hand, considers it our duty to believe it to be personal. And his reasoning is, that as we find ourselves involved in metaphysical contradictions when we endeavour to conceive this First Cause, the matter is beyond our understanding, and it is our duty to direct our thoughts only to what we can understand. He distinguishes between *mystery* and *contradiction*, pointing out that the apparent contradictions attending a mystery (such as the question, how unextended objects can by their conjunction produce extension, or how the motions of the material particles of our bodies can result in consciousness) extend in *both directions;* that is to say, the propositions with which they are concerned are such that we are equally involved in absurdities, whether we affirm, or deny them. "Contradiction," he says (Lecture V., p. 99), "does not begin till we direct our thoughts, not to the fact itself, but to that which it suggests as beyond itself. This difference is precisely that which exists between following the laws of thought, and striving to transcend them; between leaving the mystery of knowing and being unsolved, and making unlawful attempts to solve it. Thus the highest principles of thought and action to which we can attain are *regulative*, not *speculative*—they do not serve to satisfy the reason, but to guide the conduct; they do not tell us what things are in themselves, but how we must conduct ourselves in relation to them."

There is, I conceive, no inconsistency between Dean Mansel's *speculative* and *regulative* principles of thought and action, as thus explained by him. The former being beyond our intellectual vision, it is to the latter alone that we must give our attention. And among these latter are the grounds (amply stated by the Dean, especially in his fourth lecture) for looking upon the First Cause as having the attribute of personality. It may be a question, however, how far he was judicious in dwelling so much as he has done upon

the apparent contradictions involved in our endeavours to comprehend the First Cause. And I think he has certainly laid himself open to the objection specified by Mr. Lias, and enlarged upon (though with a different object) by Mr. Spencer himself in the passage lately quoted.

But Mr. Lias boldly denies that "the Infinite" and "the Absolute" are terms properly applied to the Deity at all. And in this I believe he is right If God were to be conceived of as "the Infinite," we could scarcely think it true that He cannot do evil, depart from truth, or deny Himself; for these are limitations to His character. And if He were to be conceived of as "the Absolute" He could not stand in the relation of Creator to the universe, since to be absolute is to be free from relation to any thing whatever. In short, these negative terms are apt to mislead. Why not speak of God as a *perfect* Being? This is a positive idea, however inadequate. We can conceive of Him as perfectly wise, by thinking of all His actions as guided by consummate wisdom; as perfectly just, by thinking of all His actions as free from the slightest taint of injustice; and so of His other attributes.

Again, Mr. Lias appears to me to be quite correct in tracing the mistakes on this head to the doctrine that abstract ideas have an objective existence. In this he agrees with Bishop Berkeley, although I do not think he would concur in the view maintained by the latter, that a denial of the objectivity of abstract ideas must lead logically to the denial of an external world. At least I profess myself unable to adopt that conclusion. Berkeley goes upon the old supposition that the idea of an external object is a representation or likeness of that object, and inasmuch as there can be no resemblance between a thought in the mind and an object outside the mind, he concludes that there is no such object. But why must the idea of an external object be a likeness of it? Can we not conceive such an object to be perceived by the mind without there being any likeness between it and the idea it excites? If an object be supposed to be presented to the senses, thereby exciting certain sensations of colour, figure, sound, &c., what impossibility can there be in such a supposition? It is quite a gratuitous assumption to say there must be a likeness between the outward object and the sensations which it excites. How such sensations are produced by it, we know not. The effect of matter on mind, as has been already observed, is admitted to be utterly incomprehensible by us. So far as we know, therefore, it is quite as possible that objects should affect our minds in one way as in another, seeing that they do affect them.

But to return to the subject of abstract ideas, with respect to which we are at one with Bishop Berkeley, though not with respect to the doctrine he considers it to lead to, we may join him in his laugh against Locke's description of such an idea. Taking as an example the general idea of a triangle, this philosopher says (Book IV., chap. 7, sec. 9): "it must be neither oblique nor rectangle, neither equilateral, equicrural, nor scalenon, but all and none of these at once." Now, I venture to think that Locke here inadvertently used the wrong conjunction. Instead of saying "*neither* equilateral, equicrural, *nor* scalenon," I think he should have said "*either* equilateral, equicrural, *or*

scalenon ;" and instead of "all and none of these at once" ("all" denoting several particulars united by the conjunction "and," and "none" denoting several particulars disjoined by the particle "nor"), he should have said "some one of these at a time, and no more." Abstract ideas, like their signs (which in ordinary language are words or names, and in algebraic language are letters or symbols), can only be presented to the mind singly. If we think of man in the abstract, we do not think of him as a human being without any features, nor, on the other hand, as possessing all the various features at once that a human being can have, but as having one set of features out of many,—those of either Peter, James, or John, for example. And if we think of any algebraic question involving numbers, we take a letter (*a*, for instance) not to represent at the same time *all* numbers or *none*, but some particular number (*either* 3, 5, 10, &c.), and it must denote the same number throughout the calculation. Thus, abstract ideas and the words or symbols which represent them are, as Locke confesses, "fictions and contrivances of the mind." They serve for convenience in reasoning or speech, but have no objective existence.

And if this is so with respect to ideas, still more is it the case with the objects they are supposed to represent. To avoid confusion, however, it should be remarked that there are two kinds of abstraction :—1. We may think of a subject without reference to certain of the qualities belonging to it. This is the kind of abstraction which leads up from individuals to species and genera. Or, 2. We may think of a certain quality without reference to the subject to which it belongs, as of whiteness, for example, which may belong to several different materials. I am disposed to think that some philosophical errors have arisen from not observing this distinction. As an example of the second kind of abstraction, existence is a quality common to all objects of thought, and may therefore be thought of in the abstract. This, however, does not mean that it can be thought of *apart from everything existing*, but as belonging to *some one* of the innumerable things that exist, no matter which ; and we may think of it at one moment as belonging to a book, at another as belonging to a man, or at a third as belonging to God. But to think of existence without anything that exists is to me impossible. Perhaps some of the philosophical errors about the Absolute, and the Unconditioned, and so forth, might have been avoided if this distinction had been more attended to. In a similar manner, motion apart from anything that moves, whiteness apart from anything that is white, &c., are, I venture to think, impossible conceptions, and resemble those abstract ideas which, as Mr. Lias justly observes, have no objective existence. The term "Absolute," denoting existence under no relations, and the term "Unconditioned," denoting existence under no conditions, seem to have much the same signification as existence without anything that exists. In short, such words, really meaningless, have a kind of philosophical ring, calculated only to bewilder and mislead.

## THE AUTHOR'S REPLY.

I HAVE thought it best to substitute a written reply for that which I delivered on the evening of the discussion. This I do, partly because the lateness of the hour obliged me to curtail what I wished to say, and partly because the observations I then made were rather supplementary to my paper than in reply to the speeches delivered, which, as a rule, though dealing with the subject at the head of the paper, had very little connexion with the paper itself.

In the few observations which I did make, I put in the forefront a remark which fell from Mr. Woods Smith. That gentleman appeared to suppose that I had said that God was not infinite. What I actually said was that He was not "the Infinite" of metaphysics, which is a very different thing.* I should regret it much if any reader of my paper who might happen to have a slight acquaintance with metaphysical terminology should thus misunderstand my language. Perhaps the best way of expressing the truth about God in this respect is to adopt the language of the First Article of the Church of England, and speak of God as "of infinite power, wisdom, and goodness," and to remember that with regard to the first of these attributes it is limited by the last—God can do nothing which would not be consistent with goodness. Could He do so, He would not be good.

On one other point mentioned by Mr. Woods Smith I may make a remark. He laid great stress upon the inward revelation of God, and said that even Mr. Spencer admitted that it could take place. An inward revelation of God as the "Unknowable" would not be of much practical benefit to anybody, and therefore (1) Mr. Herbert Spencer's admission does not amount to much; and (2) Mr. Spencer's meaning in those words is certainly a very different thing from the interpretation Mr. Woods Smith would place upon them. The limits of my paper did not allow me to enlarge very much on the revelation of God to the inner man. That I did not neglect it, paragraph 30 will show. But all inner revelations need to be connected by external considerations, or there would be no means of distinguishing between religion and fanaticism; or, rather, objective truth would disappear altogether, and that would be truth which each person thought to be so. It is very easy to see to what utterly Agnostic conclusions this would lead us. The fact is, that, if what we subjectively believe to be truth be really so, it

* Mill, in his *Examination of Sir W. Hamilton's Philosophy*, p. 55, speaks with some degree of scorn of the "Infinite" and "Absolute," calling them "meaningless abstractions," and declaring that they are "notions contradictory in themselves, and to which no corresponding realities do or can exist."

must correspond with the objective revelation of God in the world around us.* In other words, faith and right reason must correspond. The scientific argument for God, which is the main subject of this paper, must answer to the internal conceptions we form of Him. This scientific argument rests upon high authority. The greatest of the schoolmen, Thomas Aquinas, writes: "It is a common sentiment of the fathers and other theologians that God can be demonstrated to exist by natural reason, though always *à posteriori*, and through that which He effects." And a greater than St. Thomas Aquinas has told us that "the invisible things of Him from the creation are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made."†

There are only two other remarks on my paper to which I need refer. They occur in the speech of Prebendary Row. In answer to his criticism that I did not touch upon the Revelation of God through the manhood of Jesus Christ, I would refer him to paragraph 34. I would willingly have enlarged on the subject, but it is to be remembered that my task was simply to indicate the various lines of argument open to us on the subject; had I followed them out, my paper must have become, not merely a volume, but a library.

Another remark of Prebendary Row's fills a chasm in the paper, which I observed on reading it over, and which was due to my desire to keep within considerably narrower limits than on the last occasion on which I addressed the Institute. He spoke of the interminable debates on metaphysical subjects which occupied the Eastern Church in the fourth century and those which immediately succeeded it. I myself have had a little experience of this fact, through my presence at the conference held at Bonn in 1875, where many Eastern theologians were present, and where the metaphysical subtleties in their disquisitions were inexhaustible. From the time of Origen to our own, the attempt to form correct abstract conceptions of God has been the parent of controversy, and the chief point which now prevents the Churches of the East from brotherly intercommunion with their brethren in the West is one which is chiefly concerned with such abstract conceptions. The "perplexities" of which I spoke in paragraph 15, as arising from the attempt to base our theological systems on abstract ideas of God, have taken sixteen hundred years to unravel, and they are not unravelled yet.

I proceed to make a few remarks supplementary to the paper. And, first, I would point out the precise point on which I venture to join issue with Mr. Spencer, since, perhaps, the difficulty of the subject may cause some misapprehension; he appears to regard all phenomena as surrounded by a vast background of what is unknowable; man is like one bearing a lantern and surrounded by a fog; his lantern enables him clearly to discern objects a few paces around him, but beyond is a vast impenetrable background of fog;

---

* Objective, be it explained, refers to that which exists outside of us; subjective, to the ideas we ourselves form on any point.

† Rom. i. 20.

a few indistinct objects near at hand may be dimly discerned through the vapour; beyond these all is invisible. It is with the few objects clearly discerned that science deals; it may deal conjecturally or empirically with the objects dimly discerned; all the rest is the sphere with which religion has to deal.* It is precisely here that I would wish to demur to Mr. Spencer's view, if I rightly understand his meaning. I wish to deny emphatically that, while science deals with what is within, and religion only with what is outside the sphere of our mental vision, science deals with all that is permitted to be seen, and religion only with all that is hidden by the fog. And, even if I do not rightly understand his meaning, I would still desire to combat that which is supposed to be his teaching, or represented to be so by a host of writers who call themselves Agnostics. I would say that it is *not* with the unknowable, as such, that religion professes to deal, but with what is known; and the distinction between religion and science is not that the latter deals with the knowable and the former with the unknowable, but that the former deals with physical and metaphysical, the latter with moral and spiritual facts. And, as the man in the fog knows that he experiences sensations and goes through processes which are connected with objects other than those he can see, so religion deals with a class of experiences and of processes which are directly derived from contact with the unseen.

The πρῶτον ψεῦδος of Dean Mansel's treatise is supposed by many to be his view that all conceptions of God are not absolute, but relative. But the truth or falsehood of this remark depends upon the meaning we attach to those words. Two meanings of the word "absolute" will be found in § 17 of this paper, but there is a third sense in which it is constantly used which is altogether different; it is used as equivalent to "entire."† If we suppose Dean Mansel to mean that our conceptions of God cannot possibly be true, but are simply proportionate to some unknown truth, we are bound to protest against his language; if, on the other hand, he means that our conceptions of God do not represent Him as a being entirely unconnected with everything else, but are derived from the relation or connexion in which He stands to us, we should hardly, I suppose, feel ourselves strongly moved to contradict him. When Clement of Alexandria teaches that God is above space, and time, and name, and conception,‡ we should not reject his doctrine; but when we come to add that He is above being and outside of all relation, or even when, like Clement in the passage above cited, we say that we know not what He is, but that we know what He is not, we feel that this is, practically at least, to represent Him as non-existent. We

---

* See note on p. 108.

† As in Mill, *Examination of Sir W. Hamilton's Philosophy*, p. 43, "The Absolute must be absolutely something, either absolutely this or absolutely that." But the absolute, in the strict sense of the word, cannot be "absolutely" anything, because this would involve relation.

‡ *Strom.*, book v. ch. ii. It may be observed that Athanasius (see p. 107) is only quoting his master, Clement.

do not profess to contend that we can comprehend all that God is, or that our conceptions (it is perhaps better to say this than *conception*) of Him correspond in all respects to the fulness of the reality. All that we say is, that He is not to us the "Unknowable," for we feel that much may be certainly known about Him, and that, if it be true that "our knowledge of Him be not absolute but relative," that knowledge is a knowledge, accurate so far as it goes, of His Being, so far as it is made known through those relations—a knowledge derived from consciousness, from reason, and from revelation both in its external and internal sense.

Mr. Spencer, it must be added, has in some respects modified in his appendix the statement he made in his *First Principles*. What he says in the former may be seen in § 4. In his appendix (p. 581), he says "that an Unknowable Power, known with absolute certainty" (does this mean unconnected or entire certainty?) "is the sphere for religious feeling." Whether the words I have quoted above do or do not warrant the conclusion which Mr. Spencer goes on emphatically to disavow, that he has declared "the ignorance alone to be the sphere of religious feeling," I have no desire to discuss. What I do wish to point out is, that a great many other persons than Professor Birks have drawn this conclusion, or a conclusion practically undistinguishable from it. It is not what Mr. Herbert Spencer says, but what he is popularly regarded as saying, with which, as I have said, I wish to deal. It is the general notion abroad that, as God is the Unknowable, we cannot know anything about Him, and therefore the best thing we can do is to leave off thinking and feeling about Him, that I desire to combat. That the world in general, when it is informed that it is its "highest wisdom and its highest duty to regard God as unknowable" will imagine that religion is connected, not merely with the fact of the Unknowability, but with the resulting ignorance on our part, seems at least very likely. Mr. Herbert Spencer is, of course, not concerned with popular misrepresentations of his exact and carefully-considered language. But those who care for the interests of religion *are* concerned with those misrepresentations, and they are thankful to be able to inform the world that Mr. Spencer does *not* mean that our ignorance of God is the sphere of religious feeling, as many people seem to imagine.

But, as the readers of the paper will have observed, the simile of the fog by no means presents the subject before us in all its bearings. The unseen, we may safely affirm, is very far from being in all respects the unknown. Physica researches have proved for us the existence of something unseen, with which the phenomena of nature are closely connected. That something we call force. Of force in itself we know nothing; it belongs to the sphere of the unknowable; but of its effects, of its methods of action, we know a good deal. Thus, though force belongs to the unseen, and as regards what, it is in itself, to the unknown, there are many "manifestations" of it which are thoroughly "knowable." So we contend that God, though unseen, and in the totality of His nature unknown to us, has also vouchsafed "manifestations" of His existence to us which are thoroughly "knowable,"

and enable us to affirm "with absolute certainty" many things about Him besides the fact of His existence.

I might have strengthened the argument in paragraphs 27 and 29 if I had referred to those pioneers of progress in past ages to whom we owe our present civil and religious liberty. Professor Harrison, in his papers on Positivism, has often spoken with the utmost enthusiasm of these men; but it never appears in the least to strike him what a monstrous injustice it is that they should have suffered, as they did suffer, wrongs so cruel, tortures so fiendish, in a cause so holy, and that they should have endured them with the noblest fortitude to the end, while we, who perhaps neither have, nor would have, raised a finger in defence of the cause, are enjoying the blessings their miseries have won for us. "Other men laboured and ye have entered into their labours," says Jesus Christ, with a complacency which would be simply intolerable were there no world where each labourer received his due. If there be no such world, then the present order of things is an iniquity so hideous, that it may fairly be pleaded in justification of any crime on the part of those who are included within it.

I have not placed Mr. Spencer's name at the head of this paper, though I have not scrupled to criticise some of his statements. For it is rather with the practical consequences of those statements than with the statements themselves that I wished chiefly to deal. I wish to speak with all respect of a thinker whose fame has spread throughout the world. Nor have I the least desire to fasten on him any conclusions which he would desire to repudiate. My object is, if possible, to correct some floating ideas of the age, derived to a great extent from the system which originated with him. Whatever be Mr. Spencer's idea of our relations to God, whether I have correctly represented his words or not, the notion is widely prevalent just now that, while science is definite, tangible, intelligible, religion is concerned only with what is phantasmal, indefinite, imaginary. As God is unknowable, he is practically—so we are told—nothing at all to us. It is just there where the interpreters of Mr. Spencer's philosophy go wrong. As He is in Himself, in the "breadth, length, depth, and height" of His Being, God is beyond our power to grasp. But what He is *to us*, that we know perfectly well. Nor is this merely subjective knowledge. In the words, "What He is to us," it is not the conceptions we subjectively form of Him, but the objective manifestations of His Nature, that are referred to. This is what the Scriptures tell us. If St. Paul, when he speaks of knowing God, corrects himself, and says "or rather are known by God," he means that, whether we can know God in all the fulness of His Being or not, there can be no mistake about the fact that we are brought into "knowable" relations to Him, and that the very fact of those relations enables us to know a good deal about the nature of Him to Whom we are thus related. If, in fine, the words, "I know God," in their strictest literal interpretation be incorrect, at least there is nothing illogical or unphilosophical in the statement, "I know Whom I have believed, and am persuaded that He is able to guard that which I have committed unto Him against that day."